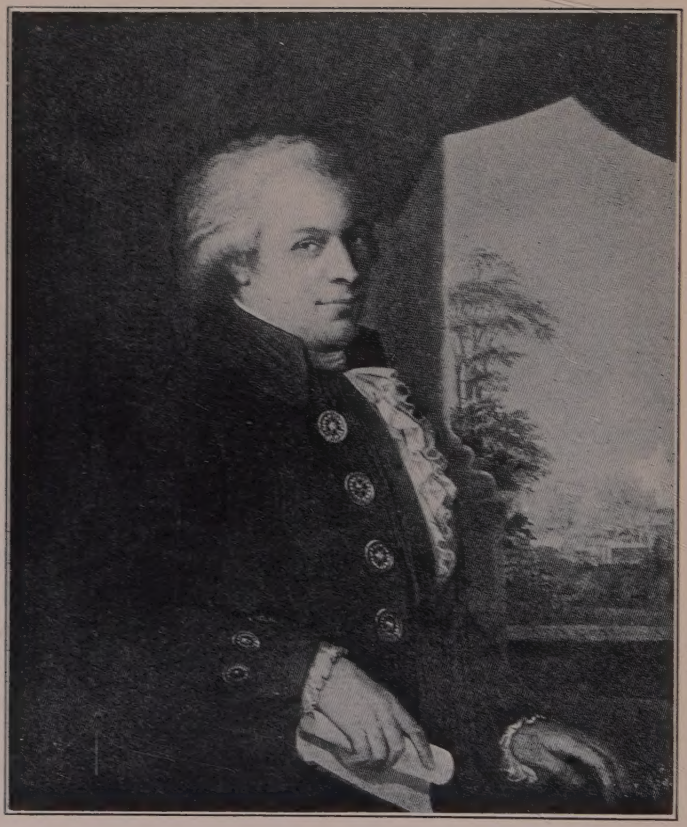
C. Froebling

A BOOK OF OPERAS



MOZART

(After a painting owned by the Author)

HENRY EDWARD KREHBIEL

A BOOK OF OPERAS

Their Histories, Their Plots, and Their Music

GARDEN CITY PUBLISHING CO., INC.
GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

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To

LUCIEN WULSIN

AN OLD FRIEND

"Old friends are best." — SELDEN.

"I love everything that's old, — old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine." — GOLDSMITH.

"Old wood to burn! Old wine to drink! Old friends to trust! Old authors to read!" — MELCHIOR.

A BOOK OF OPERAS

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A BOOK OF OPERAS

CHAPTER I

"IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA"

THE history of what is popularly called Italian opera begins in the United States with a performance of Rossini's lyrical comedy "Il Barbiere di Siviglia"; it may, therefore, fittingly take the first place in these operatic studies. The place was the Park Theatre, in Park Row, opposite the present Post Office, and the date November 29, 1825. It was not the first performance of Italian opera music in America, however, nor yet of Rossini's merry work. In the early years of the nineteenth century New York was almost as fully abreast of the times in the matter of dramatic entertainments as London. New works produced in the English capital were heard in New York as soon as the ships of that day could bring over the books and the actors. Especially was this true of English ballad operas and English transcriptions, or adaptations, of French, German, and Italian operas. New York was five months ahead of Paris in making the acquaintance of the operatic version of Beaumarchais's "Barbier de Séville." The first performance of

Rossini's opera took place in Rome on February 5, 1816. London heard it in its original form at the King's Theatre on March 10, 1818, with Garcia, the first *Count Almaviva*, in that part. The opera "went off with unbounded applause," says Parke (an oboe player, who has left us two volumes of entertaining and instructive memoirs), but it did not win the degree of favor enjoyed by the other operas of Rossini then current on the English stage. It dropped out of the repertory of the King's Theatre and was not revived until 1822 — a year in which the popularity of Rossini in the British metropolis may be measured by the fact that all but four of the operas brought forward that year were composed by him. The first Parisian representation of the opera took place on October 26, 1819. Garcia was again in the cast. By that time, in all likelihood, all of musical New York that could muster up a pucker was already whistling "Largo al factotum" and the beginning of "Una voce poco fà," for, on May 17, 1819, Thomas Phillipps had brought an English "Barber of Seville" forward at a benefit performance for himself at the same Park Theatre at which more than six years later the Garcia company, the first Italian opera troupe to visit the New World, performed it in Italian on the date already mentioned. At Mr. Phillipps's performance the beneficiary sang the part of *Almaviva*, and Miss Leesugg, who afterward became the wife of the comedian Hackett, was the *Rosina*. On November 21, 1821, there was another performance for Mr.

Phillipps's benefit, and this time Mrs. Holman took the part of *Rosina*. Phillipps and Holman — brave names these in the dramatic annals of New York and London a little less than a century ago! When will European writers on music begin to realize that musical culture in America is not just now in its beginnings?

It was Manuel Garcia's troupe that first performed "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" in New York, and four of the parts in the opera were played by members of his family. Manuel, the father, was the *Count*, as he had been at the premières in Rome, London, and Paris; Manuel, son, was the *Figaro* (he lived to read about eighty-one years of operatic enterprise in New York, and died at the age of 101 years in London in 1906); Signora Garcia, *mère*, was the *Berta*, and *Rosina* was sung and played by that "cunning pattern of excellent nature," as a writer of the day called her, Signorina Garcia, afterward the famous Malibran. The other performers at this representation of the Italian "Barber" were Signor Rosich (*Dr. Bartolo*), Signor Angrisani (*Don Basilio*), and Signor Crivelli, the younger (*Fiorello*). The opera was given twenty-three times in a season of seventy-nine nights, and the receipts ranged from $1843 on the opening night and $1834 on the closing, down to $356 on the twenty-ninth night.

But neither Phillipps nor Garcia was the first to present an operatic version of Beaumarchais's comedy to the American people. French operas by

Rousseau, Monsigny, Dalayrac, and Grétry, which may be said to have composed the staple of the opera-houses of Europe in the last decades of the eighteenth century, were known also in the contemporaneous theatres of Charleston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. In 1794 the last three of these cities enjoyed "an opera in 3 acts," the text by Colman, entitled, "The Spanish Barber; or, The Futile Precaution." Nothing is said in the announcements of this opera touching the authorship of the music, but it seems to be an inevitable conclusion that it was Paisiello's, composed for St. Petersburg about 1780. There were German "Barbers" in existence at the time composed by Benda (Friedrich Ludwig), Elsperger, and Schulz, but they did not enjoy large popularity in their own country, and Isouard's "Barbier" was not yet written. Paisiello's opera, on the contrary, was extremely popular, throughout Europe. True, he called it "The Barber of Seville," not "The Spanish Barber," but Colman's subtitle, "The Futile Precaution," came from the original French title. Rossini also adopted it and purposely avoided the chief title set by Beaumarchais and used by Paisiello; but he was not long permitted to have his way. Thereby hangs a tale of the composition and first failure of his opera which I must now relate.

On December 26, 1815, the first day of the carnival season, Rossini produced his opera, "Torvaldo e Dorliska," at the Teatro Argentina, in Rome, and at the same time signed a contract with Ce-

sarini, the impresario of the theatre, to have the first act of a second opera ready on the twentieth day of the following January. For this opera Rossini was to receive 400 Roman scudi (the equivalent of about $400) after the first three performances, which he was to conduct seated at the pianoforte in the orchestra, as was then the custom. He seems to have agreed to take any libretto submitted by the impresario and approved by the public censor; but there are indications that Sterbini, who was to write the libretto, had already suggested a remodelling of Paisiello's "Barber." In order to expedite the work of composition it was provided in the contract that Rossini was to take lodgings with a singer named Zamboni, to whom the honor fell of being the original of the town factotum in Rossini's opera. Some say that Rossini completed the score in thirteen days; some in fifteen. Castil-Blaze says it was a month, but the truth is that the work consumed less than half that period. Donizetti, asked if he believed that Rossini had really written the score in thirteen days, is reported to have replied, no doubt with a malicious twinkle in his eyes: "It is very possible; he is so lazy." Paisiello was still alive, and so was at least the memory of his opera, so Rossini, as a precautionary measure, thought it wise to spike, if possible, the guns of an apprehended opposition. So he addressed a letter to the venerable composer, asking leave to make use of the subject. He got permission and then wrote a preface to his libretto

(or had Serbini write it for him), in which, while flattering his predecessor, he nevertheless contrived to indicate that he considered the opera of that venerable musician old-fashioned, undramatic, and outdated. "Beaumarchais's comedy, entitled 'The Barber of Seville, or the Useless Precaution,'" he wrote, "is presented at Rome in the form of a comic drama under the title of 'Almaviva, ossia l'inutile Precauzione,' in order that the public may be fully convinced of the sentiments of respect and veneration by which the author of the music of this drama is animated with regard to the celebrated Paisiello, who has already treated the subject under its primitive title. Himself invited to undertake this difficult task, the maestro Gioachino Rossini, in order to avoid the reproach of entering rashly into rivalry with the immortal author who preceded him, expressly required that 'The Barber of Seville' should be entirely versified anew, and also that new situations should be added for the musical pieces which, moreover, are required by the modern theatrical taste, entirely changed since the time when the renowned Paisiello wrote his work."

I have told the story of the fiasco made by Rossini's opera on its first production at the Argentine Theatre on February 5, 1816, in an extended preface to the vocal score of "Il Barbiere," published in 1900 by G. Schirmer, and a quotation from that preface will serve here quite as well as a paraphrase; so I quote (with an avowal of gratitude for the privilege to the publishers):—

Paisiello gave his consent to the use of the subject, believing that the opera of his young rival would assuredly fail. At the same time he wrote to a friend in Rome, asking him to do all in his power to compass a fiasco for the opera. The young composer's enemies were not sluggish. All the whistlers of Italy, says Castil-Blaze, seemed to have made a rendezvous at the Teatro Argentina on the night set down for the first production. Their malicious intentions were helped along by accidents at the outset of the performance. Details of the story have been preserved for us in an account written by Signora Giorgi-Righetti, who sang the part of *Rosina* on the memorable occasion. Garcia had persuaded Rossini to permit him to sing a Spanish song to his own accompaniment on a guitar under *Rosina's* balcony in the first act. It would provide the needed local color, he urged. When about to start his song, Garcia found that he had forgotten to tune his guitar. He began to set the pegs in the face of the waiting public. A string broke, and a new one was drawn up amid the titters of the spectators. The song did not please the auditors, who mocked at the singer by humming Spanish fiorituri after him. Boisterous laughter broke out when *Figaro* came on the stage also with a guitar, and "Largo al factotum" was lost in the din. Another howl of delighted derision went up when *Rosina's* voice was heard singing within: "Segui o caro, deh segui così" ("Continue, my dear, continue thus"). The audience continued "thus." The representative of *Rosina* was popular, but the fact that she was first heard in a trifling phrase instead of an aria caused disappointment. The duet, between *Almaviva* and *Figaro*, was sung amid hisses, shrieks, and shouts. The cavatina "Una voce poco fà" got a triple round of applause, however, and Rossini, interpreting the fact as a compliment to the personality of the singer rather than to the music, after bowing to the public, exclaimed: "Oh natura!"

"Thank her," retorted Giorgi-Righetti; "but for her you would not have had occasion to rise from your chair." The turmoil began again with the next duet, and the finale was mere dumb show. When the curtain fell, Rossini faced the mob, shrugged his shoulders, and clapped his hands to show his contempt. Only the musicians and singers heard the second act, the din being incessant from beginning to end. Rossini remained imperturbable, and when Giorgi-Rhigetti, Garcia, and Zamboni hastened to his lodgings to offer their condolences as soon as they could don street attire, they found him asleep. The next day he wrote the cavatina "Ecco ridente in cielo" to take the place of Garcia's unlucky Spanish song, borrowing the air from his own "Aureliano," composed two years before, into which it had been incorporated from "Ciro," a still earlier work. When night came, he feigned illness so as to escape the task of conducting. By that time his enemies had worn themselves out. The music was heard amid loud plaudits, and in a week the opera had scored a tremendous success.

And now for the dramatic and musical contents of "Il Barbiere." At the very outset Rossini opens the door for us to take a glimpse at the changes in musical manner which were wrought by time. He had faulted Paisiello's opera because in parts it had become antiquated, for which reason he had had new situations introduced to meet the "modern theatrical taste"; but he lived fifty years after "Il Barbiere" had conquered the world, and never took the trouble to write an overture for it, the one originally composed for the opera having been lost soon after the first production. The overture which leads us into the opera nowadays is all very well in its way and a striking example of how a

piece of music may benefit from fortuitous circumstances. Persons with fantastic imaginations have rhapsodized on its appositeness, and professed to hear in it the whispered plottings of the lovers and the merry raillery of *Rosina*, contrasted with the futile ragings of her grouty guardian; but when Rossini composed this piece of music, its mission was to introduce an adventure of the Emperor Aurelian in Palmyra in the third century of the Christian era. Having served that purpose, it became the prelude to another opera which dealt with Queen Elizabeth of England, a monarch who reigned some twelve hundred years after Aurelian. Again, before the melody now known as that of *Almaviva's* cavatina (which supplanted Garcia's unlucky Spanish song) had burst into the efflorescence which now distinguishes it, it came as a chorus from the mouths of Cyrus and his Persians in ancient Babylon. Truly, the verities of time and place sat lightly on the Italian opera composers of a hundred years ago. But the serenade which follows the rising of the curtain preserves a custom more general at the time of Beaumarchais than now, though it is not yet obsolete. *Dr. Bartolo*, who is guardian of the fascinating *Rosina*, is in love with her, or at least wishes for reasons not entirely dissociated from her money bags to make her his wife, and therefore keeps her most of the time behind bolts and bars. The *Count Almaviva*, however, has seen her on a visit from his estates to Seville, becomes enamoured of her, and she has felt her heart warmed

toward him, though she is ignorant of his rank and knows him only under the name of *Lindoro.* Hoping that it may bring him an opportunity for a glance, mayhap a word with his inamorata, *Almaviva* follows the advice given by *Sir Proteus* to *Thurio* in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona"; he visits his lady's chamber window, not at night, but at early dawn, with a "sweet concert," and to the instruments of *Fiorello's* musicians tunes "a deploring dump." It is the cavatina "Ecco ridente in cielo." The musicians, rewarded by *Almaviva* beyond expectations, are profuse and long-winded in their expression of gratitude, and are gotten rid of with difficulty. The *Count* has not yet had a glimpse of *Rosina,* who is in the habit of breathing the morning air from the balcony of her prison house, and is about to despair when *Figaro,* barber and Seville's factotum, appears trolling a song in which he recites his accomplishments, the universality of his employments, and the great demand for his services. ("Largo al factotum dello città.") The *Count* recognizes him, tells of his vain vigils in front of *Rosina's* balcony, and, so soon as he learns that *Figaro* is a sort of man of all work to *Bartolo,* employs him as his go-between. *Rosina* now appears on the balcony. *Almaviva* is about to engage her in conversation when *Bartolo* appears and discovers a billet-doux which *Rosina* had intended to drop into the hand of her *Lindoro.* He demands to see it, but she explains that it is but a copy of the words of an aria from an opera entitled "The

Futile Precaution," and drops it from the balcony, as if by accident. She sends *Bartolo* to recover it, but *Almaviva*, who had observed the device, secures it, and *Bartolo* is told by his crafty ward that the wind must have carried it away. Growing suspicious, he commands her into the house and goes away to hasten the preparations for his wedding, after giving orders that no one is to be admitted to the house save *Don Basilio, Rosina's* singing-master, and *Bartolo's* messenger and general mischief-maker.

The letter which *Rosina* had thus slyly conveyed to her unknown lover begged him to contrive means to let her know his name, condition, and intentions respecting herself. *Figaro*, taking the case in hand at once, suggests that *Almaviva* publish his answer in a ballad. This the *Count* does ("Se il mio nome saper"), protesting the honesty and ardor of his passion, but still concealing his name and station. He is delighted to hear his lady-love's voice bidding him to continue his song. (It is the phrase, "Segui, o caro, deh segui così," which sounded so monstrously diverting at the first representation of the opera in Rome.) After the second stanza *Rosina* essays a longer response, but is interrupted by some of the inmates of the house. *Figaro* now confides to the *Count* a scheme by which he is to meet his fair enslaver face to face: he is to assume the rôle of a drunken soldier who has been billeted upon *Dr. Bartolo*, a plan that is favored by the fact that a company of soldiers has come to Seville that very

day which is under the command of the *Count's* cousin. The plan is promptly put into execution. Not long after, *Rosina* enters *Dr. Bartolo's* library singing the famous cavatina, "Una voce poco fà," in which she tells of her love for *Lindoro* and proclaims her determination to have her own way in the matter of her heart, in spite of all that her tyrannical guardian or anybody else can do. This cavatina has been the show piece of hundreds of singers ever since it was written. Signora Giorgi-Righetti, the first *Rosina*, was a contralto, and sang the music in the key of E, in which it was written. When it became one of Jenny Lind's display airs, it was transposed to F and tricked out with a great abundance of fiorituri. Adelina Patti in her youth used so to overburden its already florid measures with ornament that the story goes that once when she sang it for Rossini, the old master dryly remarked: "A very pretty air; who composed it?" *Figaro* enters at the conclusion of *Rosina's* song, and the two are about to exchange confidences when *Bartolo* enters with *Basilio*, who confides to the old doctor his suspicion that the unknown lover of *Rosina* is the *Count Almaviva*, and suggests that the latter's presence in Seville be made irksome by a few adroitly spread innuendoes against his character. How a calumny, ingeniously published, may grow from a whispered zephyr to a crashing, detonating tempest, *Basilio* describes in the buffo air "La calunnia" — a marvellous example of the device of crescendo which in this form is one of Rossini's

inventions. *Bartolo* prefers his own plan of compelling his ward to marry him at once. He goes with *Basilio* to draw up a marriage agreement, and *Figaro,* who has overheard their talk, acquaints *Rosina* with its purport. He also tells her that she shall soon see her lover face to face if she will but send him a line by his hands. Thus he secures a letter from her, but learns that the artful minx had written it before he entered. Her ink-stained fingers, the disappearance of a sheet of paper from his writing desk, and the condition of his quill pen convince *Bartolo* on his return that he is being deceived, and he resolves that henceforth his ward shall be more closely confined than ever. And so he informs her, while she mimics his angry gestures behind his back. In another moment there is a boisterous knocking and shouting at the door, and in comes *Almaviva,* disguised as a cavalry soldier most obviously in his cups. He manages to make himself known to *Rosina,* and exchanges letters with her under the very nose of her jailer, affects a fury toward *Dr. Bartolo* when the latter claims exemption from the billet, and escapes arrest only by secretly making himself known to the officer commanding the soldiers who had been drawn into the house by the disturbance. The sudden and inexplicable change of conduct on the part of the soldiers petrifies *Bartolo;* he is literally "astonied," and *Figaro* makes him the victim of several laughable pranks before he recovers his wits.

Dr. Bartolo's suspicions have been aroused about

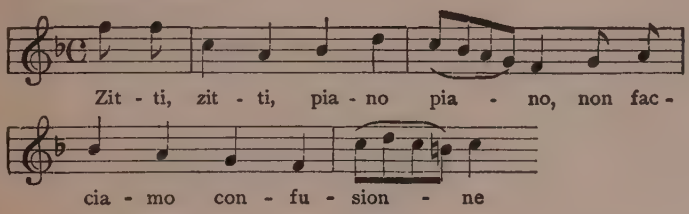
the soldier, concerning whose identity he makes vain inquiries, but he does not hesitate to admit to his library a seeming music-master who announces himself as *Don Alonzo*, come to act as substitute for *Don Basilio*, who, he says, is ill. Of course it is *Almaviva*. Soon the ill-natured guardian grows impatient of his garrulity, and *Almaviva*, to allay his suspicions and gain a sight of his inamorata, gives him a letter written by *Rosina* to *Lindoro*, which he says he had found in the *Count's* lodgings. If he can but see the lady, he hopes by means of the letter to convince her of *Lindoro's* faithlessness. This device, though it disturbs its inventor, is successful, and *Bartolo* brings in his ward to receive her music lesson. Here, according to tradition, there stood in the original score a trio which was lost with the overture. Very welcome has this loss appeared to the *Rosinas* of a later day, for it has enabled them to introduce into the "lesson scene" music of their own choice, and, of course, such as showed their voices and art to the best advantage. Very amusing have been the anachronisms which have resulted from these illustrations of artistic vanity, and diverting are the glimpses which they give of the tastes and sensibilities of great prime donne. Grisi and Alboni, stimulated by the example of Catalani (though not in this opera), could think of nothing nobler than to display their skill by singing Rode's Air and Variations, a violin piece. This grew hackneyed, but, nevertheless, survived till a comparatively late day. Bosio, feeling that

variations were necessary, threw Rode's over in favor of those on "Gia della mente involarmi" — a polka tune from Alary's "A Tre Nozze." Then Mme. Gassier ushered in the day of the vocal waltz — Venzano's, of amiable memory. Her followers have not yet died out, though Patti substituted Arditi's "Il Bacio" for Venzano's; Mme. Sembrich, Strauss's "Voce di Primavera," and Mme. Melba, Arditi's "Se saran rose." Mme. Viardot, with a finer sense of the fitness of things, but either forgetful or not apprehensive of the fate which befell her father at the first performance of the opera in Rome, introduced a Spanish song. Mme. Patti always kept a ready repertory for the scene, with a song in the vernacular of the people for whom she was singing to bring the enthusiasm to a climax and a finish: "Home, Sweet Home" in New York and London, "Solovei" in St. Petersburg. Usually she began with the bolero from "Les Vêpres Siciliennes," or the shadow dance from "Dinorah." Mme. Sembrich, living in a period when the style of song of which she and Mme. Melba are still the brightest exemplars, is not as familiar as it used to be when they were children, also found it necessary to have an extended list of pieces ready at hand to satisfy the rapacious public. She was wont at first to sing Proch's Air and Variations, but that always led to a demand for more, and whether she supplemented it with "Ah! non giunge," from "La Sonnambula," the bolero from "The Sicilian Vespers," "O luce di quest anima," from "Linda," or the

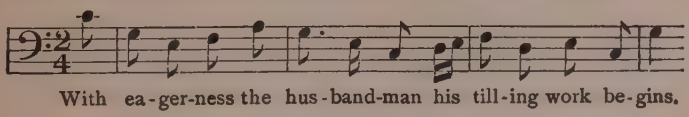
vocalized waltz by Strauss, the applause always was riotous, and so remained until she sat down to the pianoforte and sang Chopin's "Maiden's Wish," in Polish, to her own accompaniment. As for Mme. Melba, not to be set in the shade simply because Mme. Sembrich is almost as good a pianist as she is a singer, she supplements Arditi's waltz or Massenet's "Sevillana" with Tosti's "Mattinata," to which she also plays an exquisite accompaniment.

But this is a long digression; I must back to my intriguing lovers, who have made good use of the lesson scene to repeat their protestations of affection and lay plots for attaining their happiness. In this they are helped by *Figaro*, who comes to shave *Dr. Bartolo* in spite of his protests, and, contriving to get hold of the latter's keys, "conveys" the one which opens the balcony lock, and thus makes possible a plan for a midnight elopement. In the midst of the lesson the real *Basilio* comes to meet his appointment, and there is a moment of confusion for the plotters, out of which *Figaro* extricates them by persuading *Basilio* that he is sick of a raging fever, and must go instantly home, *Almaviva* adding a convincing argument in the shape of a generously lined purse. Nevertheless, *Basilio* afterwards betrays the *Count* to *Bartolo*, who commands him to bring a notary to the house that very night so that he may sign the marriage contract with *Rosina*. In the midst of a tempest *Figaro* and the *Count* let themselves into the house at midnight to carry off *Rosina*, but find her in a

whimsy, her mind having been poisoned against her lover by *Bartolo* with the aid of the unfortunate letter. Out of this dilemma *Almaviva* extricates himself by confessing his identity, and the pair are about to steal away when the discovery is made that the ladder to the balcony has been carried away. As they are tiptoeing toward the window, the three sing a trio in which there is such obvious use of a melodic phrase which belongs to Haydn that every writer on "Il Barbiere" seems to have thought it his duty to point out an instance of "plagiarism" on the part of Rossini. It is a trifling matter. The trio begins thus: —



which is a slightly varied form of four measures from *Simon's* song in the first part of "The Seasons": —



With these four measures the likeness begins and ends. A venial offence, if it be an offence at all. Composers were not held to so strict and scrupulous an accountability touching melodic *meum* and *tuum* a century ago as they are now; yet there

was then a thousand-fold more melodic inventiveness. Another case of "conveyance" by Rossini has also been pointed out; the air of the duenna in the third act beginning "Il vecchiotto cerca moglie" is said to be that of a song which Rossini heard a Russian lady sing in Rome. I have searched much in Russian song literature and failed to find the alleged original. To finish the story: the notary summoned by *Bartolo* arrives on the scene, but is persuaded by *Figaro* to draw up an attestation of a marriage agreement between *Count Almaviva* and *Rosina,* and *Bartolo,* finding at the last that all his precautions have been in vain, comforted not a little by the gift of his ward's dower, which the *Count* relinquishes, gives his blessing to the lovers.

I have told the story of "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" as it appears in the book. It has grown to be the custom to omit in performance several of the incidents which are essential to the development and understanding of the plot. Some day — soon, it is to be hoped — managers, singers, and public will awake to a realization that, even in the old operas in which beautiful singing is supposed to be the be-all and end-all, the action ought to be kept coherent. In that happy day Rossini's effervescent lyrical arrangement of Beaumarchais's vivacious comedy will be restored to its rights.

CHAPTER II

"LE NOZZE DI FIGARO"

BEAUMARCHAIS wrote a trilogy of Figaro comedies, and if the tastes and methods of a century or so ago had been like those of the present, we might have had also a trilogy of Figaro operas — "Le Barbier de Seville," "Le Mariage de Figaro," and "La Mère coupable." As it is, we have operatic versions of the first two of the comedies, Mozart's "Nozze di Figaro" being a sequel to Rossini's "Il Barbiere," its action beginning at a period not long after the precautions of *Dr. Bartolo* had been rendered inutile by *Figaro's* cunning schemes and *Almaviva* had installed *Rosina* as his countess. "Le Nozze" was composed a whole generation before Rossini's opera. Mozart and his public could keep the sequence of incidents in view, however, from the fact that Paisiello had acquainted them with the beginning of the story. Paisiello's opera is dead, but Rossini's is very much alive, and it might prove interesting, some day, to have the two living operas brought together in performance in order to note the effect produced upon each other by comparison of their scores. One effect, I fancy,

would be to make the elder of the operas sound younger than its companion, because of the greater variety and freshness, as well as dramatic vigor, of its music. But though the names of many of the characters would be the same, we should scarcely recognize their musical physiognomies. We should find the sprightly *Rosina* of "Il Barbiere" changed into a mature lady with a countenance sicklied o'er with the pale cast of a gentle melancholy; the *Count's* tenor would, in the short interval, have changed into barytone: *Figaro's* barytone into a bass, while the buffo-bass of *Don Basilio* would have reversed the process with age and gone upward into the tenor region. We should meet with some new characters, of which two at least would supply the element of dramatic freshness and vivacity which we should miss from the company of the first opera — *Susanna* and *Cherubino*.

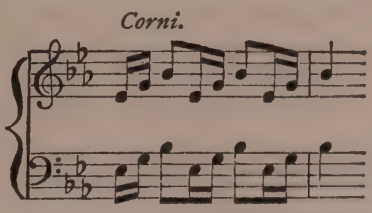
We should also, in all likelihood, be struck by the difference in the moral atmosphere of the two works It took Beaumarchais three years to secure a public performance of his "Mariage de Figaro" because of the opposition of the French court, with Louis XVI at its head, to its too frank libertinism. This opposition spread also to other royal and imperial personages, who did not relish the manner in which the poet had castigated the nobility, exalted the intellectuality of menials, and satirized the social and political conditions which were generally prevalent a short time before the French Revolution. Neither of the operas, however, met the obstacles

which blocked the progress of the comedies on which they are founded, because Da Ponte, who wrote the book for Mozart, and Sterbini, who was Rossini's librettist, judiciously and deftly elided the objectionable political element. "Le Nozze" is by far the more ingeniously constructed play of the two (though a trifle too involved for popular comprehension in the original language), but "Il Barbiere" has the advantage of freedom from the moral grossness which pollutes its companion. For the unspoiled taste of the better class of opera patrons, there is a livelier as well as a lovelier charm in the story of *Almaviva's* adventures while outwitting *Dr. Bartolo* and carrying off the winsome *Rosina* to be his countess than in the depiction of his amatory intrigues after marriage. In fact, there is something especially repellent in the *Count's* lustful pursuit of the bride of the man to whose intellectual resourcefulness he owed the successful outcome of his own wooing.

It is, indeed, a fortunate thing for Mozart's music that so few opera-goers understand Italian nowadays. The play is a moral blister, and the less intelligible it is made by excisions in its dialogue, the better, in one respect, for the virtuous sensibilities of its auditors. One point which can be sacrificed without detriment to the music and at only a trifling cost to the comedy (even when it is looked upon from the viewpoint which prevailed in Europe at the period of its creation) is that which Beaumarchais relied on chiefly to add piquancy to the

conduct of the *Count. Almaviva,* we are given to understand, on his marriage with *Rosina* had voluntarily abandoned an ancient seignorial right, described by *Susanna* as "certe mezz' ore che il diritto feudale," but is desirous of reviving the practice in the case of the *Countess's* bewitching maid on the eve of her marriage to his valet. It is this discovery which induces *Figaro* to invent his scheme for expediting the wedding, and lends a touch of humor to the scene in which *Figaro* asks that he and his bride enjoy the first-fruits of the reform while the villagers lustily hymn the merits of their "virtuous" lord; but the too frank discussion of the subject with which the dialogue teems might easily be avoided. The opera, like all the old works of the lyrical stage, is in sad need of intelligent revision and thorough study, so that its dramatic as well as its musical beauties may be preserved. There is no lovelier merit in Mozart's music than the depth and tenderness with which the honest love of *Susanna* for *Figaro* and the *Countess* for her lord are published; and it is no demerit that the volatile passion of the adolescent *Cherubino* and the frolicsome, scintillant, vivacious spirit of the plotters are also given voice. Mozart's music could not be all that it is if it did not enter fully and unreservedly into the spirit of the comedy; it is what it is because whenever the opportunity presented itself, he raised it into the realm of the ideal. Yet Mozart was no Puritan. He swam along gayly and contentedly on the careless current of life as

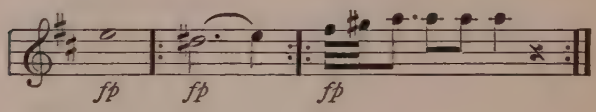
it was lived in Vienna and elsewhere in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, and was not averse, merely for the fun of the thing, to go even a step beyond his librettist when the chance offered. Here is an instance in point: The plotters have been working a little at cross-purposes, each seeking his own advantages, and their plans are about to be put to the test when *Figaro* temporarily loses confidence in the honesty of *Susanna*. With his trust in her falls to the ground his faith in all womankind. He rails against the whole sex in the air, beginning: "Aprite un po' quegl' occhi?" in the last act. Enumerating the moral blemishes of women, he at length seems to be fairly choked by his own spleen, and bursts out at the end with "Il resto nol dico, gia ognuno lo sa" ("The rest I'll not tell you — everybody knows it"). The orchestra stops, all but the horns, which with the phrase



aided by a traditional gesture (the singer's forefingers pointing upward from his forehead), complete his meaning. It is a pity that the air is often omitted, for it is eloquent in the exposition of the spirit of the comedy.

The merriest of opera overtures introduces "Le

Nozze di Figaro," and puts the listener at once into a frolicsome mood. It seems to be the most careless of little pieces, drawing none of its material from the music of the play, making light of some of the formulas which demanded respect at the time (there is no free fantasia), laughing and singing its innocent life out in less than five minutes as if it were breathing an atmosphere of pure oxygen. It romps; it does not reflect or feel. Motion is its business, not emotion. It has no concern with the deep and gentle feelings of the play, but only with its frolic. The spirit of playful torment, the disposition of a pretty tease, speaks out of its second subject:—



and one may, if one wishes, hear the voice of only half-serious admonition in the phrase of the basses, which the violins echo as if in mockery:—

Bassi Viola & Fag.

But, on the whole, the overture does not ask for analysis or interpretation; it is satisfied to express untrammelled joy in existence.

The curtain is withdrawn, and we discover the lovers preparing for their wedding. *Figaro* is

taking the dimensions of a room, and the first motive of a duet illustrates his measured paces; *Susanna* is trimming a hat, and her happiness and her complacent satisfaction with her handiwork are published in the second motive, whose innocent joy explodes in scintillant semi-quavers in the fiddles at the third measure. His labors ended, *Figaro* joins *Susanna* in her utterances of joy. But there is a fly in the ointment. Why has *Figaro* been so busily measuring the room? To test its fitness as their chamber, for the *Count* has assigned it to them, though it is one of the best rooms in the palace. He points out its convenient location (duet: "Se a caso madama"); so near the room of the *Countess* that her maid can easily answer the "din din" of her bell, and near enough to the room of the *Count* that his "don don" would never sound in vain should he wish to send his valet on an errand. Altogether too convenient, explains *Susanna;* some fine day the *Count's* "don don" might mean a three-mile journey for the valet, and then the devil would fetch the dear *Count* to her side in three paces. Has he not been making love violently to her for a space, sending *Don Basilio* to give her singing lessons and to urge her to accept his suit? Did *Figaro* imagine it was because of his own pretty face that the *Count* had promised her so handsome a dowry? *Figaro* had pressed such a flattering unction to his soul, but now recalls, with not a little jealous perturbation, that the *Count* had planned to take him with him to London, where he was to

go on a mission of state: "He as ambassador, *Figaro* as a courier, and *Susanna* as ambassadress in secret. Is that your game, my lord? Then I'll set the pace for your dancing with my guitar" (Cavatina: "Se vuol ballare").

Almaviva's obedient valet disappears, and presto! in his place we see our old friend, the cunning, resourceful barber and town factotum of the earlier days, who shall hatch out a plot to confound his master and shield his love from persecution. First of all he must hasten the wedding. He sets about this at once, but all unconscious of the fact that *Dr. Bartolo* has never forgiven nor forgotten the part he played in robbing him of his ward *Rosina.* He comes now to let us know that he is seeking revenge against *Figaro* and at the same time, as he hopes, rid himself of his old housekeeper, *Marcellina,* to whom he is bound by an obligation that is becoming irksome. The old duenna has been casting amatory glances in *Figaro's* direction, and has a hold on him in the shape of a written obligation to marry her in default of repayment of a sum of money borrowed in a time of need. She enlists *Bartolo* as adviser, and he agrees to lay the matter before the *Count.* Somewhat early, but naturally enough in the case of the conceited dotard, he gloats over his vengeance, which seems as good as accomplished, and celebrates his triumph in an air ("La vendetta!"). As she is about to leave the room, *Marcellina* meets *Susanna,* and the two make a forced effort to conceal their mutual hatred and

jealousy in an amusing duettino ("Via resti servita, madama brillante!"), full of satirical compliments and curtsies. *Marcellina* is bowed out of the room with extravagant politeness, and *Susanna* turns her attention to her mistress's wardrobe, only to be interrupted by the entrance of *Cherubino*, the *Count's* page. Though a mere stripling, *Cherubino* is already a budding voluptuary, animated with a wish, something like that of Byron's hero, that all womankind had but a single mouth and he the privilege of kissing it. He adores the *Countess;* but not her alone. *Susanna* has a ribbon in her hand with which, she tells him, she binds up her mistress's tresses at night. Happy *Susanna!* Happy ribbon! *Cherubino* seizes it, refuses to give it up, and offers in exchange his latest ballad. "What shall I do with the song?" asks *Susanna.* "Sing it to the *Countess!* Sing it yourself! Sing it to *Barbarina,* to *Marcellina,* to all the ladies in the palace!" He tells *Susanna* (Air: "Non so più cosa son") of the torments which he endures. The lad's mind is, indeed, in a parlous state; he feels his body alternately burning and freezing; the mere sight of a maiden sends the blood to his cheeks, and he needs must sigh whenever he hears her voice; sleeping and waking, by lakeside, in the shadow of the woods, on the mountain, by stream and fountain, his thoughts are only of love and its sweet pains. It is quite impossible to describe the eloquence with which Mozart's music expresses the feverish unrest, the turmoil, and the longing which fill the lad's

soul. Otto Jahn has attempted it, and I shall quote his effort: —

> The vibration of sentiment, never amounting to actual passion, the mingled anguish and delight of the longing which can never be satisfied, are expressed with a power of beauty raising them out of the domain of mere sensuality. Very remarkable is the simplicity of the means by which this extraordinary effect is attained. A violin accompaniment passage, not unusual in itself, keeps up the restless movement; the harmonies make no striking progressions; strong emphasis and accents are sparingly used, and yet the soft flow of the music is made suggestive of the consuming glow of passion. The instrumentation is here of a very peculiar effect and quite a novel coloring; the stringed instruments are muted, and clarinets occur for the first time, and very prominently, both alone and in combination with the horns and bassoons.

Cherubino's philandering with *Susanna* is interrupted by the *Count*, who comes with protestations of love, which the page hears from a hiding-place behind a large arm-chair, where *Susanna*, in her embarrassment, had hastily concealed him on the *Count's* entrance. The *Count's* philandering, in turn, is interrupted by *Basilio*, whose voice is heard long enough before his entrance to permit the *Count* also to seek a hiding-place. He, too, gets behind the chair, while *Cherubino*, screened by *Susanna's* skirts, ensconces himself in the seat, and finds cover under one of the *Countess's* gowns which *Susanna* hurriedly throws over him. *Don Basilio* comes in search of the *Count*, but promptly begins his pleas in behalf of his master. Receiving nothing

but indignant rejoinders, he twits *Susanna* with loving the lad, and more than intimates that *Cherubino* is in love with the *Countess*. Why else does he devour her with his eyes when serving her at table? And had he not composed a canzonetta for her? Far be it from him, however, to add a word to what "everybody says." "Everybody says what?" demands the *Count*, discovering himself. A trio follows ("Cosa sento!"). The *Count*, though in a rage, preserves a dignified behavior and orders the instant dismissal of the page from the palace. *Susanna* is overwhelmed with confusion, and plainly betrays her agitation. She swoons, and her companions are about to place her in the arm-chair when she realizes a danger and recovers consciousness. *Don Basilio* cringes before the *Count*, but is maliciously delighted at the turn which affairs have taken.

The *Count* is stern. *Cherubino* had once before incurred his displeasure by poaching in his preserves. He had visited *Barbarina*, the pretty daughter of his gardener, and found the door bolted. The maid appeared confused, and he, seeking an explanation, drew the cover from the table and found the page hiding under. He illustrates his action by lifting the gown thrown over the chair, and there is the page again! This, then, is the reason of *Susanna's* seeming prudery—the page, her lover! He accuses *Susanna*, who asserts her innocence, and truthfully says that *Cherubino* had come to ask her to procure the *Countess's* inter-

cession in his behalf, when his entrance had thrown them both into such confusion that *Cherubino* had concealed himself. Where? Behind the arm-chair. But the *Count* himself had hidden there. True, but a moment before the page had slipped around and into the chair. Then he had heard all that the *Count* had said to *Susanna? Cherubino* says he had tried his best not to overhear anything. *Figaro* is sent for and enters with the villagers, who hymn the virtues of their lord. To the *Count's* question as to the meaning of the demonstration, *Figaro* explains that it is an expression of their gratitude for the *Count's* surrender of seignorial rights, and that his subjects wish him to celebrate the occasion by bestowing the hand of *Susanna* on *Figaro* at once and himself placing the bridal veil upon her brow. The *Count* sees through *Figaro's* trick, but believing it will be frustrated by *Marcellina's* appeal, he promises to honor the bride, as requested, in due season. *Cherubino* has begged for the *Count's* forgiveness, and *Susanna* has urged his youth in extenuation of his fault. Reminded that the lad knows of his pursuit of *Susanna,* the *Count* modifies his sentence of dismissal from his service to banishment to Seville as an officer in his regiment. *Figaro* playfully inducts him into the new existence.

The air "Non più andrai," in which this is done, is in vigorous march rhythm. Benucci, the original *Figaro* in Vienna, had a superbly sonorous voice, and Michael Kelly, the English tenor (who sang the

two rôles of *Don Basilio* and *Don Curzio*), tells us how thrillingly he sang the song at the first rehearsal with the full band. Mozart was on the stage in a crimson pelisse and cocked hat trimmed with gold lace, giving the time to the orchestra. *Figaro* gave the song with the greatest animation and power of voice. "I was standing close to Mozart," says Kelly, "who, *sotto voce*, was repeating: 'Bravo, bravo, Benucci!' and when Benucci came to the fine passage, 'Cherubino, alla vittoria, alla gloria militar,' which he gave out with stentorian lungs, the effect was electricity itself, for the whole of the performers on the stage, and those in the orchestra, as if actuated by one feeling of delight, vociferated: 'Bravo, bravo, maestro! Viva, viva, grande Mozart!' Those in the orchestra I thought would never have ceased applauding by beating the bows of their violins against the music desks. The little man acknowledged by repeated obeisances his thanks for the distinguished mark of enthusiastic applause bestowed upon him."

This ends the first act. At the opening of the second the *Countess* asks our sympathy because of the unhappiness caused by her errant husband. (Cavatina: "Porgi amor.") She prays the god of love to restore her to his affections. *Susanna* entering, the *Countess* asks her to continue her tale of the *Count's* pursuit of her. There is nothing to add, says the maid; the *Count* wooed as noblemen woo women of her class — with money. *Figaro* appears to tell that the *Count* is aiding *Marcellina*

in her scheme and of the trick which he has devised to circumvent him. He had sent *Basilio* to his lordship with a letter warning him that the *Countess* had made an appointment to meet a lover at the ball to be given in the evening. This would fan the fires of his jealousy and so enrage him that he would forget his designs against *Susanna* until she was safely married, when he would discover that he had been outwitted. In the meantime, while he is reflecting on the fact that two could play at the game, *Susanna* is to apprise the *Count* that she will meet him in the garden in the evening. *Cherubino,* whose departure to Seville had been delayed for the purpose, is to meet the *Count* disguised as *Susanna,* and the *Countess,* appearing on the scene, is to unmask him. The *Count* is supposed to have gone a-hunting, and the plotters have two hours for preparation. *Figaro* leaves them to find *Cherubino,* that he may be put into petticoats. When the page comes, the *Countess* first insists on hearing the song which he had given to *Susanna,* and *Cherubino,* stammering and blushing at first, sings it to *Susanna's* guitar. (Canzone: "Voi che sapete.") Again I call upon Otto Jahn for a description of the music. "*Cherubino* is not here directly expressing his feelings; he is depicting them in a romance, and he is in the presence of the *Countess,* toward whom he glances with all the bashfulness of boyish passion. The song is in ballad form, to suit the situation, the voice executing the clear, lovely melody, while the stringed instruments carry

on a simple accompaniment pizzicato, to imitate the guitar: this delicate outline is, however, shaded and animated in a wonderful degree by solo wind instruments. Without being absolutely necessary for the progress of the melodies and the completeness of the harmonies, they supply the delicate touches of detail, reading between the lines of the romance, as it were, what is passing in the heart of the singer. We know not whether to admire most the gracefulness of the melodies, the delicacy of the disposition of the parts, the charm of the tone coloring, or the tenderness of the expression — the whole is of entrancing beauty."

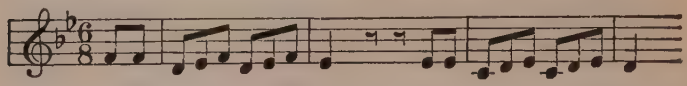
Susanna finds that she and *Cherubino* are of the same height, and begins to array him in garments belonging to her, first locking the door against possible intruders. The *Countess* views the adventure with some misgivings at first, but, after all, *Cherubino* is a mere boy, and she rejoices him with approval of his songs, and smiles upon him till he is deliriously happy. *Basilio* has given him his commission in the *Count's* regiment, and the *Countess* discovers that it lacks a seal to secure which would cause a longer and desired delay. While *Susanna* is playing the rôle of dressing-maid to *Cherubino*, and instructing him in a ladylike bearing, the *Count* raps for admission to the room. *Figaro's* decoy letter caused him uneasiness, and he had abandoned the hunt. *Cherubino* hurries into the chamber, and the *Countess* turns the key upon him before admitting his lordship, who enters in an ill-humor

which is soon turned into jealous rage. *Cherubino* has awkwardly overturned a chair in the chamber, and though the *Countess* explains that *Susanna* is within, she refuses to open the door, on the plea that her maid is making her toilet. The *Count* goes for tools to break open the door, taking the *Countess* with him. *Susanna,* who has heard all from an alcove, hastens to *Cherubino's* rescue, who escapes by leaping from the window of the *Countess's* apartment into the garden below. *Susanna* takes his place in the chamber. Then begins the most marvellously ingenious and beautiful finale in the whole literature of opera. Fast upon each other follow no fewer than eight independent pieces of music, each a perfect delineation of the quickly changing moods and situations of the comedy, yet each built up on the lines of musical symmetry, and developing a musical theme which, though it passes from mouth to mouth, appears each time to belong peculiarly to the person uttering it. The *Countess* throws herself upon the mercy of the *Count,* confesses that *Cherubino,* suspiciously garbed, is in the chamber, but pleads for his life and protests her innocence of wrong. She gives the key to her enraged husband, who draws his sword, unlocks the door, and commands the page to stand forth. *Susanna* confronts the pair with grave unconsciousness upon her features. The *Countess* is no less amazed than her lord.

The *Count* goes into the chamber to search for the page, giving *Susanna* a chance to explain, and the nimble-witted women are ready for him when

he comes back confused, confounded, and ready to ask forgiveness of his wife, who becomes tearful and accusing, telling him at length that the story of the page's presence was all an invention to test him. But the letter giving word of the assignation? Written by *Figaro*. He then shall be punished. Forgiveness is deserved only by those willing to forgive. All is well, and the *Countess* gives her hand to be kissed by her lord. Enters *Figaro* with joyous music to announce that all's ready for the wedding; trumpets sounding, pipes tootling, peasants singing and dancing. The *Count* throws a damper upon his exuberant spirits. How about that letter? In spite of the efforts of the *Countess* and *Susanna* to make him confess its authorship, *Figaro* stoutly insists that he knows nothing of it. The *Count* summons *Marcellina*, but before she arrives, the drunken gardener *Antonio* appears to tell the *Count* that some one had leaped out of the salon window and damaged his plants and pots. Confusion overwhelms the women. But *Figaro's* wits are at work. He laughs loudly and accuses *Antonio* of being too tipsy to know what had happened. The gardener sticks to his story and is about to describe the man who came like a bolt from the window, when *Figaro* says it was he made the leap. He was waiting in the salon to see *Susanna*, he explains, when he heard the *Count's* footsteps, and, fearing to meet him because of the decoy letter, he had jumped from the window and got a sprained ankle, which he offers in evidence. The orchestra

changes key and tempo, and begins a new inquisition with pitiless reiteration: —

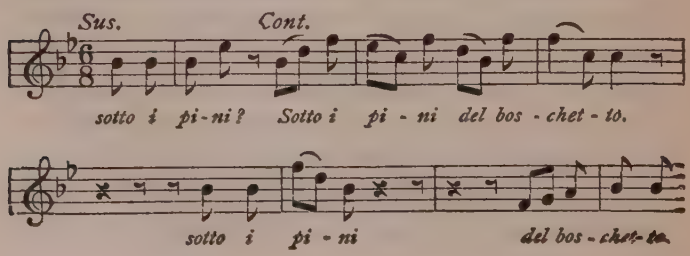


Antonio produces *Cherubino's* commission, "These, then, are your papers?" The *Count* takes the commission, opens it, and the *Countess* recognizes it. With whispers and signs the women let *Figaro* know what it is, and he is ready with the explanation that the page had left the paper with him. Why? It lacked — the women come again to his rescue — it lacked the seal. The *Count* tears up the paper in his rage at being foiled again. But his allies are at hand, in the persons of *Marcellina, Bartolo,* and *Basilio,* who appear with the accusing contract, signed by *Figaro.* The *Count* takes the case under advisement, and the act ends with *Figaro's* enemies sure of triumph and his friends dismayed.

The third act plays in a large hall of the palace decorated for the wedding. In a duet ("Crudel! perche finora") the *Count* renews his addresses to *Susanna.* She, to help along the plot to unmask him, consents to meet him in the garden. A wonderful grace rests upon the music of the duet, which Mozart's genius makes more illuminative than the words. Is it *Susanna's* native candor, or goodness, or mischievousness, or her embarrassment which prompts her to answer "yes" when "no" was expected and "no" when the *Count* had already received an affirmative? We can think as we please;

the musical effect is delicious. *Figaro's* coming interrupts further conversation, and as *Susanna* leaves the room with her, she drops a remark to *Figaro*, which the *Count* overhears: "Hush! We have won our case without a lawyer." What does it mean? Treachery, of course. Possibly *Marcellina's* silence has been purchased. But whence the money? The *Count's amour propre* is deeply wounded at the thought that his menials should outwit him and he fail of his conquest. He swears that he will be avenged upon both. Apparently he has not long to wait, for *Marcellina*, *Don Curzio*, and *Bartolo* enter, followed by *Figaro*. *Don Curzio* announces the decision of the court in the duenna's suit against *Figaro*. He must pay or marry, according to the bond. But *Figaro* refuses to abide by the decision. He is a gentleman by birth, as proved by the jewels and costly clothing found upon him when he was recovered from some robbers who stole him when a babe, and he must have the consent of his parents. He has diligently sought them and will prove his identity by a mark upon his arm. "A spatula on the right elbow?" anxiously inquires *Marcellina*. "Yes." And now *Bartolo* and the duenna, who a moment ago would fain have made him an Œdipus, recognize in *Figaro* their own son, born out of wedlock. He rushes to their arms and is found embracing his mother most tenderly by *Susanna*, who comes with a purse to repay the loan. She flies into a passion and boxes *Figaro's* ears before the situation is explained, and she is made as happy

by the unexpected dénouement as the *Count* and *Don Curzio* are miserable. *Bartolo* resolves that there shall be a double wedding; he will do tardy justice to *Marcellina.* Now we see the *Countess* again in her lamentable mood, mourning the loss of her husband's love. (Aria: "Dove sono.") *Susanna* comes to tell of her appointment with the *Count.* The place, "in the garden," seems to be lacking in clearness, and the *Countess* proposes that it be made more definite and certain (as the lawyers say), by means of a letter which shall take the form of a "Song to the Zephyr." This is the occasion of the exquisite duet which was surely in the mind of the composer's father when, writing to his daughter from Vienna after the third performance of the opera, he said: "One little duet had to be sung three times." Was there ever such exquisite dictation and transcription? Can any one say, after hearing this "Canzonetta sull' aria," that it is unnatural to melodize conversation? With what gracious tact the orchestra gives time to *Susanna* to set down the words of her mistress! How perfect is the musical reproduction of inquiry and repetition when a phrase escapes the memory of the writer!



The letter is written, read over phrase by phrase, and sealed with a pin which the *Count* is to return as proof that he has received the note.

The wedding festivities begin with a presentation of flowers to the *Countess* by the village maidens, among whom in disguise is the rogue *Cherubino* — so fair in hat and gown that the *Countess* singles him out of the throng to present his nosegay in person. *Antonio*, who had suspected that he was still about the palace, exposes him to the *Count*, who threatens the most rigorous punishment, but is obliged to grant *Barberina's* petition that he give his consent to her marriage to the page. Had he not often told her to ask him what she pleased, when kissing her in secret? Under the circumstances he can only grant the little maid's wish. During the dance which follows (it is a Spanish fandango which seems to have been popular in Vienna at the time, for Gluck had already made use of the same melody in his ballet "Don Juan"), *Susanna* kneels before the *Count* to have him place the wreath (or veil) upon her head, and slyly slips the "Canzonetta sull' aria" into his hands. He pricks his finger with the pin, drops it, but, on reading the postscript, picks it up, so that he may return it to the writer as a sign of understanding. In the evening *Barberina*, who has been commissioned to carry the pin to her cousin *Susanna*, loses it again, and her lamentation "L'ho perdita," with its childish sobs while hunting it, is one of the little gems of the opera. From her *Figaro* learns that the letter which he had seen the

Count read during the dance was from *Susanna*, and becomes furiously jealous. In an air (which has already been described), he rails against man's credulity and woman's faithlessness. The time is come to unmask the *Count*. The *Countess* and *Susanna* have exchanged dresses, and now come into the garden. Left alone, *Susanna* gives voice to her longing and love (for *Figaro*, though the situation makes it seem to be for the *Count*) in the air which has won great favor in the concert-room: "Deh vieni non tardar." Here some of Otto Jahn's words are again appropriate: —

> Mozart was right to let the feelings of the loving maiden shine forth in all their depth and purity, for *Susanna* has none but her *Figaro* in her mind, and the sentiments she expresses are her true ones. *Figaro*, in his hiding-place, listening and suspecting her of awaiting the *Count's* arrival, throws a cross-light on the situation, which, however, only receives its full dramatic signification by reason of the truth of *Susanna's* expression of feeling. *Susanna*, without her sensual charm, is inconceivable, and a tinge of sensuality is an essential element of her nature; but Mozart has transfigured it into a noble purity which may fitly be compared with the grandest achievements of Greek sculpture.

Cherubino, watched from different places of concealment by the *Count*, *Figaro*, and *Susanna*, appears, and, seeing the *Countess*, whom he takes for *Susanna*, confounds not her alone, but also the *Count* and *Figaro*, by his ardent addresses to her. He attempts to kiss her, but the *Count* steps forward and interposes his cheek. The *Count* attempts to

box *Cherubino's* ears, but *Figaro*, slipping forward at the moment, receives the blow instead. Confusion is at its height. The *Count* makes love to his wife, thinking she is *Susanna*, promises her a dowry, and places a ring on her finger. Seeing torches approaching, they withdraw into deeper darkness. *Susanna* shows herself, and *Figaro*, who takes her for the Countess, acquaints her of the *Count's* doings which he has just witnessed. *Susanna* betrays herself, and *Figaro* resolves to punish her for her masquerading. He makes love to her with extravagant pathos until interrupted by a slap in the face. *Susanna's* patience had become exhausted, and her temper got the better of her judgment. *Figaro* laughs at her ill-humor and confesses his trick, but renews his sham love-making when he sees the *Count* returning. The latter calls for lights, and seizes *Figaro* and his retainers. In the presence of all he is put to shame by the disclosures of the personality of the *Countess* and *Susanna*. He falls on his knees, asks forgiveness, receives it, and all ends happily.

CHAPTER III

"DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE"

MOZART'S "Zauberflöte" — "The Magic Flute" — is the oldest German opera holding a place on the American stage, though not quite 118 years old; but so far as my memory and records go, it has had but four performances in the original tongue in New York in a whole generation. There have been a few representations in English within this time and a considerable number in Italian, our operatic institutions being quick, as a rule, to put it upon the stage whenever they have at command a *soprano leggiero* with a voice of sufficient range and flexibility to meet the demands of the extraordinary music which Mozart wrote for the *Queen of Night* to oblige his voluble-throated sister-in-law, Mme. Hofer, who was the original representative of that character. The same operatic conditions having prevailed in New York and London for many years, it is not strange that English-speaking people have come to associate "The Magic Flute" with the Italian rather than the German repertory. Yet we have the dictum of Beethoven that it is Mozart's greatest opera, because in it his genius showed

itself in so large a variety of musical forms, ranging from ditties in the folk-song style to figurated chorale and fugue, and more particularly because in it Mozart first disclosed himself as a German composer. By this Beethoven did not mean that Mozart had not written music before for a German libretto, but that he had never written German music before in an opera. The distinction is one more easily observed by Germans and critical historians than by the ordinary frequenters of our opera-houses. "Die Zauberflöte" has a special charm for people of German blood, which is both admirable and amiable. Its magnificent choruses are sung by men, and Germany is the home of the *Männergesang;* among the opera's songs are echoes of the *Volkslied* — ditties which seem to have been caught up in the German nurseries or plucked off the lips of the itinerant German balladist; its emotional music is heartfelt, warm, ingenuous, and in form and spirit free from the artificiality of Italian opera as it was in Mozart's day and as it continued to be for a long time thereafter. It was this last virtue which gave the opera its largest importance in the eyes of Otto Jahn, Mozart's biographer. In it, he said, for the first time all the resources of cultivated art were brought to bear with the freedom of genius upon a genuine German opera. In his Italian operas, Mozart had adopted the traditions of a long period of development, and by virtue of his original genius had brought them to a climax and a conclusion; but in "Die Zauberflöte"

he "stepped across the threshold of the future and unlocked the sanctuary of national art for his countrymen."

In this view every critical historian can concur, no matter what his tastes or where his home. But it is less easy for an English, French, or Italian critic than a German to pardon the incongruities, incoherences, and silly buffooneries which mar the opera. Some of the disturbing elements are dear to the Teutonic heart. *Papageno*, for instance, is but a slightly metamorphosed Kasperl, a Jack Pudding (Hanswurst) twice removed; and Kasperl is as intimately bound up in the German nature as his cousin Punch in the English. Kasperl is, indeed, directly responsible for "Die Zauberflöte." At the end of the eighteenth century there was in Vienna a singular individual named Emmanuel Schikaneder, a Jack-of-all-trades so far as public amusements were concerned — musician, singer, actor, playwright, and manager. There can be no doubt but that he was a sad scalawag and ribald rogue, with as few moral scruples as ever burdened a purveyor of popular amusements. But he had some personal traits which endeared him to Mozart, and a degree of intellectuality which won him a fairly respectable place among the writers for the stage at the turn of the century. Moreover, when he had become prosperous enough to build a new theatre with the proceeds of "Die Zauberflöte," he was wise enough to give a generous commission, unhampered by his customary meddle-

some restrictions, to Beethoven; and discreet enough to approve of the highly virtuous book of "Fidelio." At the beginning of the last decade of the eighteenth century, however, his theatre had fallen on evil days, and in dire straits he went to Mozart, whose friendship he had enjoyed from the latter's Salzburg days, and begged him to undertake the composition of an opera for which he had written the book, in conjunction with one of his actors and choristers, named Gieseke (though this fact never received public acknowledgment at his hands). Wieland's "Oberon" had filled the popular mind with a great fondness for fantastic and Oriental subjects, and a rival manager had been successful with musical pieces in which the principal character was the popular Kasperl. Casting about for an operatic subject which should appeal to the general liking for romanticism and buffoonery at once, Schikaneder hit upon a tale called "Lulu; oder, Die Zauberflöte," written by Liebeskind, but published by Wieland in a volume of Orientalia entitled "Dschinnistan." He had got pretty deep in his work when a rival manager brought out an adaptation of the same story, with music by Wenzel Müller. The farcical character of the piece is indicated by its title, which was "Kasper, der Fagottist; oder, Die Zauberzither"; but it made so striking a success that Schikaneder feared to enter the lists against it with an opera drawn from the same source. He was either too lazy, too much in a hurry, or too indifferent to the principles of art to remodel the

completed portion, but finished his book on lines far different from those originally contemplated. The transformation thus accomplished brought about all the blemishes of "Die Zauberflöte," but also gave occasion for the sublime music with which Mozart transfigured some of the scenes. This will be understood better if an outline of Liebeskind's tale is made to precede the story of the opera as it came from Mozart's hand.

A wicked magician, *Dilsenghuin*, has robbed the "radiant fairy" *Perifirime* of her daughter, *Sidi*, and carried off a magic talisman. The magician keeps the damsel in confinement and persecutes her with amatory advances which she is able to resist through a power which is to support her so long as her heart is untouched by love. *Perifirime* promises the hand of her daughter, whose father is the King of Cashmere, to *Prince Lulu*, son of the King of Chorassan, if he regain the stolen talisman for her. To do this, however, is given only to one who has never felt the divine passion. *Lulu* undertakes the adventure, and as aids the fairy gives him a magic flute and a ring. The tone of the flute will win the hearts of all who hear it; by turning the ring, the wearer is enabled to assume any form desired at will; by throwing it away he may summon the fairy herself to his aid. The *Prince* assumes the form of an old man, and, like Orpheus, softens the nature of the wild beasts that he meets in the forest. He even melts the heart of the magician himself, who admits him to his castle.

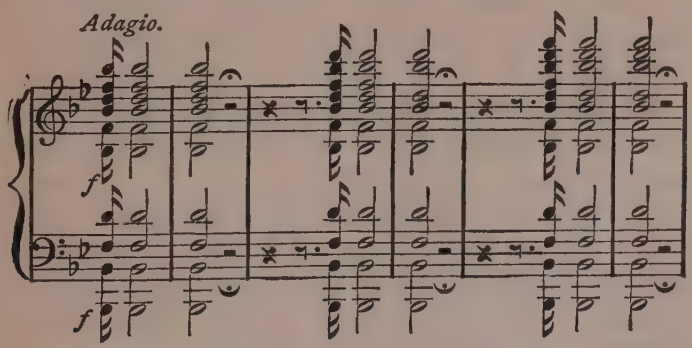
Once he is within its walls, the inmates all yield to the charm of his magical music, not excepting the lovely prisoner. At a banquet he throws the magician and his companions into a deep sleep, and possesses himself of the talisman. It is a gold fire-steel, every spark struck from which becomes a powerful spirit whose service is at the command of the possessor. With the help of genii, struck from the magical implement, and the fairy whom he summons at the last, *Prince Lulu* overcomes all the obstacles placed in his way. Discomfited, the magician flies away as an owl. *Perifirime* destroys the castle and carries the lovers in a cloud chariot to her own palace. Their royal fathers give their blessings, and *Prince Lulu* and *Princess Sidi* are joined in wedlock.

Following in a general way the lines of this story, but supplying the comic element by the creation of *Papageno* (who is Kasperl in a habiliment of feathers), Schikaneder had already got his hero into the castle of the wicked magician in quest of the daughter of the *Queen of Night* (in whose character there was not yet a trace of maleficence), when the success of his rival's earlier presentation of the story gave him pause. Now there came to him (or to his literary colleague) a conceit which fired the imagination of Mozart and added an element to the play which was bound at once to dignify it and create a popular stir that might lead to a triumph. Whence the suggestion came is not known, but its execution, so far as the libretto was

concerned, was left to Gieseke. Under the Emperor Leopold II the Austrian government had adopted a reactionary policy toward the order of Freemasons, which was suspected of making propaganda for liberal ideas in politics and religion. Both Schikaneder and Mozart belonged to the order, Mozart, indeed, being so enthusiastic a devotee that he once confessed to his father his gratitude to God that through Freemasonry he had learned to look upon death as the gateway to true happiness. In continuing the book of the opera, Schikaneder (or Gieseke for him) abruptly transformed the wicked magician into a virtuous sage who had carried off the daughter of a wicked sorceress, the *Queen of Night*, to save the maiden from the baleful influence of her mother. Instead of seeking to frustrate the efforts of the prince who comes to rescue her, the sage initiates him into the mysteries of Isis, leads him into the paths of virtue and wisdom, tests him by trials, and rewards him at the last by blessing his union with the maiden. The trials of silence, secrecy, and hardihood in passing through the dread elements of fire and water were ancient literary materials; they may be found in the account of the initiation of a neophyte into the mysteries of Isis in Apuleius's "Metamorphoses; or, The Golden Ass," a romance written in the second century. By placing the scene of the opera in Egypt, the belief of Freemasons that their order originated in that unspeakably ancient land was humored, while the use of some of its symbolism (such as the conflict

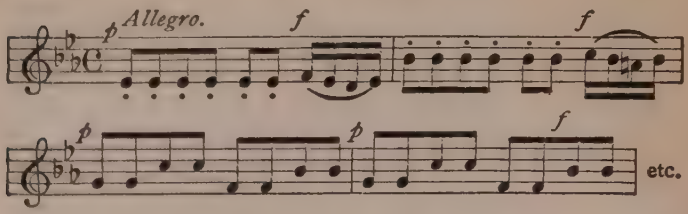
between light and darkness) and the proclamation of what were believed to be some of its ethical principles could safely be relied upon to delight the knowing and irritate the curiosity of the uninitiated. The change also led to the shabby treatment which woman receives in the opera, while Schikaneder's failure to rewrite the first part accounts for such inconsistencies as the genii who are sent to guide the prince appearing first in the service of the evil principle and afterward as agents of the good.

The overture to "Die Zauberflöte," because of its firm establishment in our concert-rooms, is more widely known than the opera. Two of its salient features have also made it the subject of large discussion among musical analysts; namely, the reiterated chords, three times three, which introduce the second part of the overture.[1]



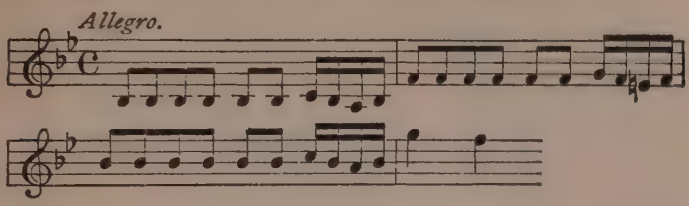
[1] These chords, played by all the wind instruments of the band, are the chords of the introduction raised to a higher power.

and the fugued *allegro*, constructed with a skill that will never cease to be a wonder to the knowing, built up on the following subject:—



In the chords (which are heard again in the temple scene, at which the hero is admitted as a novice and permitted to begin his probation), the analysts who seek to find as much symbolism as possible in the opera, see an allusion to the signals given by knocking at the door of the lodge-room. Some such purpose may been have in the mind of Mozart when he chose the device, but it was not unique when he applied it. I have found it used in an almost identical manner in the overture to "Günther von Schwarzburg," by Ignaz Holzbauer, a German opera produced in Mannheim fifteen years before "Die Zauberflöte" saw the light of the stage lamps. Mozart knew Holzbauer, who was a really great musician, and admired his music. Connected with the fugue theme there is a more familiar story. In 1781 Clementi, the great pianist and composer, visited Vienna. He made the acquaintance of Haydn, was introduced at court, and Emperor Joseph II brought him and Mozart together in a trial of skill at playing and improvising. Among other

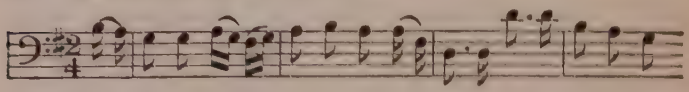
things Clementi played his own sonata in B-flat, the first movement of which begins thus: —



The resemblance between this theme and Mozart's fugal subject is too plain to need pointing out. Such likenesses were more common in Mozart's day than they were a century ago; they were more common in Handel's day than in Mozart's; they are almost as common in our day as they were in Handel's, but now we explain them as being the products of "unconscious cerebration," whereas in the eighteenth century they were frank borrowings in which there was no moral obliquity; for originality then lay as much in treatment as in thematic invention, if not more.

Come we now to a description of the action of the opera. *Tamino,* — strange to say, a "Japanese" prince, — hunting far, very far, from home, is pursued, after his last arrow has been sped, by a great serpent. He flees, cries for help, and seeing himself already in the clutch of death, falls in a swoon. At the moment of his greatest danger three veiled ladies appear on the scene and melodiously and harmoniously unite in slaying the monster. They are smitten, in unison, with the beauty of the un-

conscious youth whom they have saved, and quarrel prettily among themselves for the privilege of remaining beside him while information of the incident is bearing to the *Queen of Night*, who lives hard by in a castle. No two being willing that the third shall stay, all three go to the *Queen*, who is their mistress. *Tamino's* consciousness returning, he discovers that the serpent has been slain, and hails *Papageno*, who comes upon the scene, as his deliverer. *Papageno* is a bird-catcher by trade and in the service of the *Queen of Night* — a happy-go-lucky, talkative fellow, whose thoughts do not go beyond creature comforts. He publishes his nature (and incidentally illustrates what has been said above about the naïve character of some of the music of the opera) by trolling a ditty with an opening strain as follows: —



Papageno has no scruples about accepting credit and gratitude for the deed performed by the ladies, and, though he is the veriest poltroon, he boasts inordinately about the gigantic strength which had enabled him to strangle the serpent. He is punished for his mendacity when the ladies return and place a padlock upon his mouth, closing his lips to the things of which he is most fond — speech and food. To *Tamino* they give a miniature portrait, which excites him to rapturous song ("Dies Bildniss ist bezaubernd schön," or "Oh! cara immagine," as

the case may be). Then he learns that the original of the portrait is *Pamina*, daughter of the *Queen of Night*, stolen from her mother by a "wicked demon," *Sarastro*. In the true spirit of knight-errantry he vows that he will restore the maid to her mother's arms. There is a burst of thunder, and the *Queen* appears in such apparel and manner as the exchequer at the theatre and the ingenuity of the stage mechanic are able to provide. (When last I saw her her robe was black, bespangled with stars and glittering gems, and she rode upon the crescent moon.) She knows the merits and virtues of the youth, and promises that he shall have *Pamina* to wife if he succeeds in his adventure. *Papageno* is commanded to accompany him, and as aids the ladies give to *Tamino* a magic flute, whose tones shall protect him from every danger, and to *Papageno* a bell-chime of equal potency. (These talismans have hundreds of prototypes in the folk-lore of all peoples.) *Papageno* is loath to accompany the prince, because the magician had once threatened to spit and roast him like the bird he resembled if ever he was caught in his domain, but the magical bells give him comfort and assurance. Meanwhile the padlock has been removed from his lips, with admonitions not to lie more. In the quintet which accompanies these sayings and doings, there is exquisite music, which, it is said, Mozart conceived while playing at billiards. Finally the ladies announce that three boys, "young, beautiful, pure, and wise," shall guide the pair to the castle of *Sarastro*.

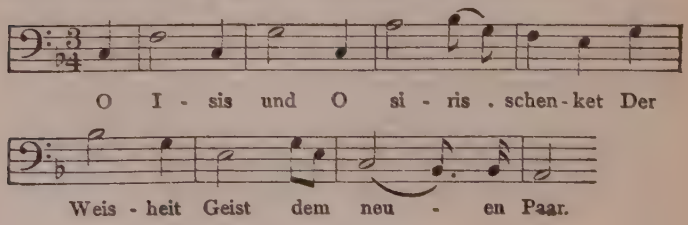
We are next in a room of the castle before the would-be rescuers arrive. *Pamina* has tried to escape, and is put in chains by her keeper, the Moor *Monostatos*. She weeps because of her misery, and repulses the protestations of love with which her jailer plagues her. *Papageno* enters the room, and he and the jailer run in opposite directions at sight of each other — *Papageno* frightened by the complexion of the blackamoor, *Monostatos* terror-stricken at the sight of a man in feathers. Returning, *Papageno* convinces himself of the identity of *Pamina* with the daughter of the *Queen of Night*, tells her of *Tamino*, who is coming for her with a heart full of love, and promptly they sing of the divine dignity of the marital state. It is the duet, "Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen," or "Là dove prende, amor ricetto," familiar to concert-rooms, and the melody to some hymnals. A story goes that Mozart had to write this duet three or five times before it would pass muster in the censorious eyes of Schikaneder. After the opera had made good its success, the duet as we have it to-day alternated at the performance with a more ornate version — in all likelihood one of the earlier forms in which Mozart cast it.

The three boys — genii they are, and if I were stage-manager they should fly like Peter Pan — lead *Tamino* into a grove wherein stand three temples dedicated respectively to Wisdom, Nature, and Reason. The precinct is sacred; the music tells us that — the halo streaming from sustained notes of flutes

and clarinets, the muted trumpets, the solemn trombones in softest monotone, the placid undulations of the song sung by the violins, the muffled, admonitory beats of the kettledrums. The genii leave *Tamino* after admonishing him to be "steadfast, patient, and silent." Conscious of a noble purpose, the hero boldly approaches the Temple of Reason, but, before he can enter its portals, is stopped by an imperative injunction from within: "Back!" He essays the Temple of Nature, and is turned away again by the ominous word. Out of the Temple of Wisdom steps an aged priest, from whom he learns that *Sarastro* is master within, and that no one is privileged to enter whose heart, like his, harbors hatred and vengeful thoughts. *Tamino* thinks *Sarastro* fully deserving of hatred and revenge, and is informed that he had been deceived by a woman — one of the sex "that does little, chatters much." *Tamino* asks if *Pamina* lives, but the priest is bound by an oath to say nothing on that subject until "the hand of friendship shall lead him to an eternal union within the sanctuary." When shall night vanish and the light appear? Oracular voices answer, "Soon, youth, or never!" Does *Pamina* live? The voices: "*Pamina* still lives!" Thus comforted, he sings his happiness, filling the pauses in his song with interludes on the flute, bringing to his feet the wild beasts and forest creatures of all sorts. He hears *Papageno's* syrinx, and at length finds the fowler with *Monostatos;* but before their joy can have expression *Pamina* and the slaves

appear and capture them. *Papageno* recollects him of his magic bells; he plays upon them, and the slaves, willy-nilly, dance themselves out of sight. Scarcely are the lovers free when a solemn strain announces the approach of *Sarastro*. He comes in a chariot drawn by lions and surrounded by a brave retinue. *Pamina* kneels to him, confesses her attempt to escape, but explains that it was to free herself from the odious attentions of *Monostatos*. The latter, asking his reward for having thwarted the plan of *Papageno*, receives it from *Sarastro* in the shape of a bastinado. *Pamina* pleads for restoration to her mother, but the sage refuses to free her, saying that her mother is a haughty woman, adding the ungallant reflection that woman's heart should be directed by man lest she step outside her sphere. He commands that *Tamino* and *Papageno* be veiled and led into the Temple of Probation. The first act is ended.

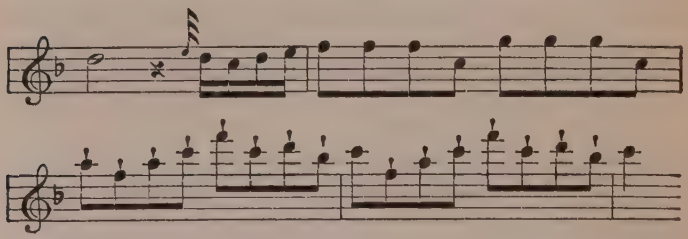
The initiation of *Tamino* and *Papageno* into the mysteries, their trials, failures, triumph, and reward, form the contents of the second act. At a conclave of the elect, *Sarastro* announces that *Tamino* stands at the door of the Temple of Wisdom, desirous to gaze upon the "great light" of the sanctuary. He prays Isis and Osiris to give strength to the neophytes:—



To the impressiveness of this prayer the orchestra contributes as potent a factor as the stately melody or the solemn harmonies. All the bright-voiced instruments are excluded, and the music assigned to three groups of sombre color, composed, respectively, (1) of divided violas and violoncellos; (2) of three trombones, and (3) of two basset horns and two bassoons. The assent of the sacerdotal assembly is indicated by the three trumpet blasts which have been described in connection with the overture, and *Tamino* and *Papageno* are admitted to the Temple, instructed, and begin their probationary trials. True to the notion of the order, two priests warn the neophytes against the wiles of woman. *Papageno* has little inclination to seek wisdom, but enters upon the trials in the hope of winning a wife who shall be like himself in appearance. In the first trial, which is that of silence, the value of the priestly warning just received is at once made apparent. *Tamino* and *Papageno* have scarcely been left alone, when the three female attendants of the *Queen of Night* appear and attempt to terrify them with tales of the false nature of the priests, whose recruits, say they, are carried to hell, body and breeches (literally "mit Haut und Haar," *i.e.* "with skin and hair"). *Papageno* becomes terror-stricken and falls to the floor, when voices within proclaim that the sanctity of the temple has been profaned by woman's presence. The ladies flee.

The scene changes. *Pamina* is seen asleep in a bower of roses, silvered over by the light of the moon.

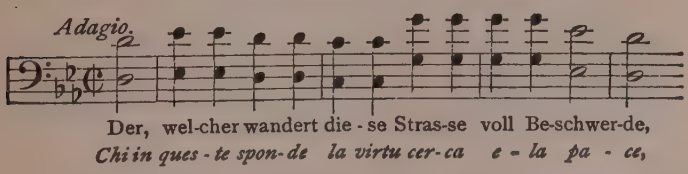
Monostatos, deploring the fact that love should be denied him because of his color, though enjoyed by everything else in nature, attempts to steal a kiss. A peal of thunder, and the *Queen of Night* rises from the ground. She importunes *Pamina* to free herself and avenge her mother's wrongs by killing *Sarastro*. To this end she hands her a dagger and pours out the "hellish rage" which "boils" in her heart in a flood of scintillant *staccati* in the tonal regions where few soprano voices move: —



Monostatos has overheard all. He wrenches the dagger from *Pamina*, urges her again to accept his love, threatens her with death, and is about to put his threat into execution when *Sarastro* enters, dismisses the slave, and announces that his revenge upon the *Queen of Night* shall lie in promoting the happiness of the daughter by securing her union with *Tamino*.

The probationary trials of *Tamino* and *Papageno* are continued. The two are led into a hall and admonished to remain silent till they hear a trumpet-call. *Papageno* falls to chattering with an old woman, is terrified beyond measure by a thunder-clap, and recovers his composure only when the genii

bring back the flute and bells and a table of food. *Tamino*, however, remains steadfast, though *Pamina* herself comes to him and pleads for a word of love. *Papageno* boasts of his own hardihood, but stops to eat, though the trumpet has called. A lion appears; *Tamino* plays his flute, and the beast returns to his cage. The youth is prepared for the final trial; he is to wander for a space through flood and flame, and *Pamina* is brought to say her tearful farewells. The courage and will of the neophyte remain unshaken, though the maiden gives way to despair and seeks to take her own life. The genii stay her hand, and assure her that *Tamino* shall be restored to her. Two men in armor guard the gates of a subterranean cavern. They sing of the rewards to be won by him who shall walk the path of danger; water, fire, air, and earth shall purify him; and if he withstand death's terrors, heaven shall receive him and he be enlightened and fitted to consecrate himself wholly to the mysteries of Isis: —



A marvellous piece of music is consorted with this oracular utterance. The words are set to an old German church melody — "Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein" — around which the orchestral instruments weave a contrapuntal web of wondrous

beauty. At the gates *Pamina* joins her lover and accompanies him on his journey, which is happily achieved with the help of the flute. Meanwhile *Papageno* is pardoned his loquacity, but told that he shall never feel the joy of the elect. He thinks he can make shift with a pretty wife instead. The old woman of the trial chamber appears and discloses herself as the charming, youthful *Papageno*, but only for an instant. He calls after her in vain, and is about to hang himself when the genii remind him of his magic bells. He rings and sings; his feathered mate comes to him. *Monostatos* aids the *Queen of Night* and her companions in an assault upon the sanctuary; but a storm confounds them, and *Sarastro* blesses the union of *Tamino* and *Pamina*, amidst joyful hymning by the elect.

An extraordinary hodgepodge, truly, yet, taken all in all, an effective stage piece. Goethe was so impressed with the ingenuity shown by Schikaneder in treating the device of contrast that he seriously contemplated writing a second part, the music of which was to be composed by Wranitzky, who set Gieseke's operatic version of "Oberon." German critics and managers have deplored its absurdities and contradictions, but have found no way to obviate them which can be said to be generally acceptable. The buffooneries cannot be separated from the sublimities without disrupting the piece, nor can its doggerel be turned into dignified verse. It were best, I fancy, that managers should treat the opera, and audiences receive it, as a sort of Christ-

mas pantomime which Mozart has glorified by his music. The tendency of German critics has been to view it with too much seriousness. It is difficult to avoid this while one is under the magic spell of its music, but the only way to become reconciled to it on reflection is to take it as the story of its creation shows that its creators intended it to be taken; namely, as a piece designed to suit the tastes of the uncultivated and careless masses. This will explain the singular sacrifice of principle which Mozart made in permitting a mountebank like Schikaneder to pass judgment on his music while he was composing it, to exact that one duet should be composed over five times before he would accept it, and even to suggest melodies for some of the numbers. Jahn would have us believe that Mozart was so concerned at the failure of the first act to win applause at the first performance that he came behind the scenes pale as death to receive comfort and encouragement from Schikaneder; I prefer to believe another story, which is to the effect that Mozart almost died with laughing when he found that the public went into ecstasies over his opera. Certain it is that his pleasure in it was divided. Schikaneder had told him that he might occasionally consult the taste of connoisseurs, and he did so, finding profound satisfaction in the music written for *Sarastro* and the priests, and doubtless also in the fine ensembles; but the enthusiasm inspired by what he knew to be concessions to the vulgar only excited his hilarity. The beautiful in the score

is amply explained by Mozart's genius and his marvellous command of the technique of composition. The dignity of the simple idea of a celebration of the mysteries of Isis would have been enough, without the composer's reverence for Freemasonry and its principles, to inspire him for a great achievement when it came to providing a setting for the scenes in which the priests figure. The rest of the music he seems to have written with little regard to coherency or unity of character. His sister-in-law had a voice of extraordinary range and elasticity; hence the two display airs; *Papageno* had to have music in keeping in his character, and Mozart doubtless wrote it with as little serious thought as he did the "Piece for an Organ in a Clock, in F minor, 4–4," and "Andante to a Waltz for a Little Organ," which can be found entered in his autograph catalogue for the last year of his life. In the overture, one of the finest of his instrumental compositions, he returned to a form that had not been in use since the time of Hasse and Graum; in the scene with the two men in armor he made use of a German chorale sung in octaves as a *canto firmo*, with counterpoint in the orchestra — a recondite idea which it is difficult to imagine him inventing for this opera. I fancy (not without evidence) that he made the number out of material found in his sketch-book. These things indicate that the depth which the critics with deep-diving and bottom-scraping proclivities affect to see in the work is rather the product of imagination than real.

CHAPTER IV

"DON GIOVANNI"

In the preceding chapter it was remarked that Mozart's "Zauberflöte" was the oldest German opera in the current American repertory. Accepting the lists of the last two decades as a criterion, "Don Giovanni" is the oldest Italian opera, save one. That one is "Le Nozze di Figaro," and it may, therefore, be said that Mozart's operas mark the beginning of the repertory as it exists at the present time in America. Twenty-five years ago it was possible to hear a few performances of Gluck's "Orfeo" in English and Italian, and its name has continued to figure occasionally ever since in the lists of works put forth by managers when inviting subscriptions for operatic seasons; but that fact can scarcely be said to have kept the opera in the repertory.

Our oldest Italian opera is less than 125 years old, and "Don Giovanni" only 122 — an inconsiderable age for a first-class work of art compared with its companion pieces in literature, painting, and sculpture, yet a highly respectable one for an opera. Music has undergone a greater revolution within the last century than any other art in thrice

the period, yet "Don Giovanni" is as much admired now as it was in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and, indeed, has less prejudice to contend with in the minds of musicians and critics than it had when it was in its infancy, and I confidently believe that to its score and that of "Le Nozze di Figaro" opera writers will soon be turning to learn the methods of dramatic characterization. Pure beauty lives in angelic wedlock with psychological expression in Mozart's dramatic music, and these factors will act as powerful loadstones in bringing composers who are now laboriously and vainly seeking devices for characterization in tricks and devices based on arbitrary formulas back to the gospel of truth and beauty. Wagner has had no successful imitator. His scheme of thematic identification and development, in its union of calculation, reflection, and musical inspiration, is beyond the capacities of those who have come after him. The bow of Ulysses is still unbent; but he will be a great musician indeed who shall use the resources of the new art with such large ease, freedom, power, and effectiveness as Mozart used those of the comparatively ingenuous art of his day. And yet the great opera composer who is to come in great likelihood will be a disciple of Gluck, Mozart, and the Wagner who wrote "Tristan und Isolde" and "Die Meistersinger" rather than one of the tribe of Debussy.

The great opera composers of the nineteenth century were of one mind touching the greatness

of "Don Giovanni." Beethoven was horrified by its licentious libretto, but tradition says that he kept before him on his writing-table a transcript of the music for the trombones in the second finale of the opera. Shortly after Mme. Viardot-Garcia came into possession of the autograph score of the masterpiece, Rossini called upon her and asked for the privilege of looking at it, adding, "I want to bow the knee before this sacred relic." After poring over a few pages, he placed his hands on the book and said, solemnly: "He is the greatest, the master of them all; the only composer who had as much science as he had genius, and as much genius as he had science." On another occasion he said to a questioner: "Vous voulez connaître celui de mes ouvrages que j'aime le mieux; eh bien, c'est 'Don Giovanni.'" Gounod celebrated the centenary of the opera by writing a commentary on it which he dedicated to young composers and artists called upon to take part in performances of the opera. In the preface of his book he characterizes it as "an unequalled and immortal masterpiece," the "apogee of the lyrical drama," a "wondrous example of truth, beauty of form, appropriateness of characterization, deep insight into the drama, purity of style, richness and restraint in instrumentation, charm and tenderness in the love passages, and power in pathos" — in one word, a "finished model of dramatic music." And then he added: "The score of 'Don Giovanni' has exercised the influence of a revelation upon the whole of my life; it has been

and remains for me a kind of incarnation of dramatic and musical impeccability. I regard it as a work without blemish, of uninterrupted perfection, and this commentary is but the humble testimony of my veneration and gratitude for the genius to whom I owe the purest and most permanent joys of my life as a musician." In his "Autobiographical Sketch" Wagner confesses that as a lad he cared only for "Die Zauberflöte," and that "Don Giovanni" was distasteful to him on account of the Italian text, which seemed to him rubbish. But in "Oper und Drama" he says: "Is it possible to find anything more perfect than every piece in 'Don Juan'? . . . Oh, how doubly dear and above all honor is Mozart to me that it was not possible for him to invent music for 'Tito' like that of 'Don Giovanni,' for 'Cosi fan tutte' like that of 'Figaro'! How shamefully would it have desecrated music!" And again: "Where else has music won so infinitely rich an individuality, been able to characterize so surely, so definitely, and in such exuberant plenitude, as here?"[1]

Mozart composed "Don Giovanni" for the Italian Opera at Prague, which had been saved from ruin in the season 1786–1787 by the phenomenal success of "Le Nozze di Figaro." He chose the subject and commissioned Lorenzo da Ponte, then official poet to the imperial theatres of Austria, to write the book of words. In doing so, the latter made

[1] See my preface to "Don Giovanni" in the Schirmer Collection of Operas.

free use of a version of the same story made by an Italian theatrical poet named Bertati, and Dr. Chrysander (who in 1886 gave me a copy of this libretto, which Mozart's biographer, Otto Jahn, had not succeeded in finding, despite diligent search) has pointed out that Mozart also took as a model some of the music to which the composer Gazzaniga had set it. The title of the opera by Bertati and Gazzaniga was "Il Convitato di Pietra." It had been brought forward with great success in Venice and won wide vogue in Italy before Mozart hit upon it. It lived many years after Mozart brought out his opera, and, indeed, was performed in London twenty-three years before Mozart's opera got a hearing. It is doubtful, however, if the London representation did justice to the work. Da Ponte was poet to the opera there when "Il Convitato" was chosen for performance, and it fell to him to prepare the book to suit the taste of the English people. He tried to persuade the management to give Mozart's opera instead, and, failing in that, had the malicious satisfaction of helping to turn the work of Bertati and Gazzaniga into a sort of literary and musical pasticcio, inserting portions of his own paraphrase of Bertati's book in place of the original scenes and preparing occasion for the insertion of musical pieces by Sarti, Frederici, and Guglielmi.

Mozart wrote the music to "Don Giovanni" in the summer of 1787. Judging by the circumstance that there is no entry in his autograph catalogue

between June 24 and August 10 in that year, it would seem that he had devoted the intervening seven weeks chiefly, if not wholly, to the work. When he went to Prague in September he carried the unfinished score with him, and worked on it there largely in the summer house of his friends, the Duscheks, who lived in the suburbs of the city. Under date of October 28 he entered the overture in his catalogue. As a matter of fact, it was not finished till the early morn of the next day, which was the day of the first production of the opera. Thereby hangs the familiar tale of how it was composed. On the evening of the day before the per formance, pen had not been touched to the overture. Nevertheless, Mozart sat with a group of merry friends until a late hour of the night. Then he went to his hotel and prepared to work. On the table was a glass of punch, and his wife sat beside him to keep him awake by telling him stories. In spite of all, sleep overcame him, and he was obliged to interrupt his work for several hours; yet at 7 o'clock in the morning the copyist was sent for and the overture was ready for him. The tardy work delayed the representation in the evening, and the orchestra had to play the overture at sight; but it was a capital band. and Mozart, who conducted, complimented it before starting into the introduction to the first air. The performance was completely successful, and floated buoyantly on a tide of enthusiasm which set in when Mozart entered the orchestra, and rose higher and higher as the music went on.

On May 7, 1788, the opera was given in Vienna, where at first it made a fiasco, though Mozart had inserted new pieces and made other alterations to humor the singers and add to its attractiveness. London heard it first on April 12, 1817, at the King's Theatre, whose finances, which were almost in an exhausted state, it restored to a flourishing condition. In the company which Manuel Garcia brought to New York in 1825 were Carlo Angrisani, who was the *Masetto* of the first London representation, and Domenico Crivelli, son of the tenor Gaetano Crivelli, who had been the *Don Ottavio*. Garcia was a tenor with a voice sufficiently deep to enable him to sing the barytone part of *Don Giovanni* in Paris and at subsequent performances in London. It does not appear that he had contemplated a performance of the opera in New York, but here he met Da Ponte, who had been a resident of the city for twenty years and recently been appointed professor of Italian literature at Columbia College. Da Ponte, as may be imagined, lost no time in calling on Garcia and setting on foot a scheme for bringing forward "my 'Don Giovanni,'" as he always called it. Crivelli was a second-rate tenor, and could not be trusted with the part of *Don Ottavio*, and a Frenchman named Milon, whom I conclude to have been a violoncello player, afterward identified with the organization of the Philharmonic Society, was engaged for that part. A Mme. Barbieri was cast for the part of *Donna Anna*, Mme. Garcia for that of *Donna Elvira*, Manuel Garcia, Jr. (who died in

1906 at the age of 101 years) for that of *Leporello*, Angrisani for his old rôle of *Masetto*, and Maria Garcia, afterward the famous Malibran, for that of *Zerlina*. The first performance took place on May 23, 1826, in the Park Theatre, and the opera was given eleven times in the season. This success, coupled with the speedily acquired popularity of Garcia's gifted daughter, was probably the reason why an English version of the opera which dominated the New York stage for nearly a quarter of a century soon appeared at the Chatham Theatre. In this version the part of the dissolute *Don* was played by H. Wallack, uncle of the Lester Wallack so long a theatrical favorite in the American metropolis. As Malibran the Signorina Garcia took part in many of the English performances of the work, which kept the Italian off the local stage till 1850, when it was revived by Max Maretzek at the Astor Place Opera-house.

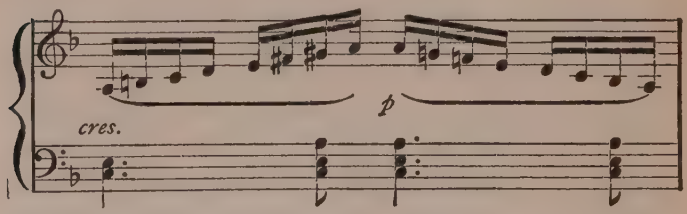
I have intimated that Bertati's opera-book was the prototype of Da Ponte's, but the story is centuries older than either. The Spanish tale of Don Juan Tenorio, who killed an enemy in a duel, insulted his memory by inviting his statue to dinner, and was sent to hell because of his refusal to repent him of his sins, was but a literary form of a legend of considerable antiquity. It seems likely that it was moulded into dramatic shape by monks in the Middle Ages; it certainly occupied industriously the minds of playwrights in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Spain, Italy, Germany, and

England. The most eminent men who treated it at various times were the Spaniard known as Tirza di Molina, the Frenchman Molière, the Italian Goldoni, and the Englishman Thomas Shadwell, whose "Libertine Destroyed" was brought forward in 1676. Before Mozart, Le Tellier had used it for a French comic opera, Righini and Gazzaniga for Italian operas, and Gluck for a ballet.

But we are concerned now only with the play as Da Ponte and Mozart gave it to us. In the dramatic terminology of the eighteenth century "Don Giovanni" was a *dramma giocoso;* in the better sense of the phrase, a playful drama — a lyric comedy. Da Ponte conceived it as such, but Mozart gave it so tragical a turn by the awful solemnity with which he infused the scene of the libertine's punishment that already in his day it was felt that the last scene as written and composed to suit the conventional type of a comic opera was an intolerable anticlimax. Mozart sounds a deeply tragical note at the outset of his overture. The introduction is an *Andante,* which he drew from the scene of the opera in which the ghostly statue of the murdered *Commandant* appears to *Don Giovanni* while he is enjoying the pleasures of the table. Two groups of solemn chords command attention and "establish at once the majestic and formidable authority of divine justice, the avenger of crime." [1] They are followed by a series of solemn progressions in stern, sinister, unyielding, merciless, implacable har-

[1] Gounod.

monies. They are like the colossal strides of approaching Fate, and this awfulness is twice raised to a higher power, first by a searching, syncopated phrase in the violins which hovers loweringly over them, and next by a succession of affrighted minor scales ascending *crescendo* and descending *piano*, the change in dynamics beginning abruptly as the crest of each terrifying wave is reached. These wonderful scales begin thus:—



in the last scene of the opera. They were an afterthought of the composer's. They did not appear in the original score of the scene, as the autograph shows, but were written in after the music had once been completed. They are crowded into the staves in tiny notes which sometimes extend from one measure into the next. This circumstance and the other, that they are all fairly written out in the autograph of the overture, indicate that they were conceived either at one of the rehearsals or while Mozart was writing the overture. They could not have been suggested at the first performance, as Jahn seems to imply.[1] The introduction is only thirty measures long, and the *Allegro* which follows

[1] "The Life of Mozart," by Otto Jahn, Vol. III, p. 169.

is made up of new material. I quote again from Gounod: "But suddenly, and with feverish audacity, the *Allegro* breaks out in the major key, an *Allegro* full of passion and delirium, deaf to the warnings of Heaven, regardless of remorse, enraptured of pleasure, madly inconstant and daring, rapid and impetuous as a torrent, flashing and swift as a sword, overleaping all obstacles, scaling balconies, and bewildering the alguazils."[1] From the tragic introduction through the impetuous main section we are led to a peaceful night scene in the garden before the house of *Donna Anna*. There *Leporello*, the servant of *Don Giovanni*, is awaiting in discontented mood for the return of his master, who has entered the house in quest of amatory adventure. *Leporello* is weary of the service in which he is engaged, and contrasts his state with that of the *Don*. (Air: "Notte e giorno faticar.") He will throw off the yoke and be a gentleman himself. He has just inflated himself with pride at the thought, when he hears footsteps, and the poltroon in his nature asserts itself. He hides behind the shrubbery. *Don Giovanni* hurries from the house, concealing his features with his cloak and impeded by *Donna Anna*, who clings to him, trying to get a look into his face and calling for help. *Don Giovanni* commands silence and threatens. The *Commandant*, *Donna Anna's* father, appears with drawn sword and challenges the intruder. *Don Giovanni* hesitates to draw against so old a man, but the *Commandant* will not parley.

[1] "Mozart's Don Giovanni," by Charles Gounod, p. 3.

They fight. At first the attacks and defences are deliberate (the music depicts it all with wonderful vividness), but at the last it is thrust and parry, thrust and parry, swiftly, mercilessly. The *Commandant* is no match for his powerful young opponent, and falls, dying. A few broken ejaculations, and all is ended. The orchestra sings a slow descending chromatic phrase "as if exhausted by the blood which oozes from the wound," says Gounod. How simple the means of expression! But let the modern composer, with all his apparatus of new harmonies and his multitude of instruments, point out a scene to match it in the entire domain of the lyric drama! *Don Giovanni* and his lumpish servant, who, with all his coward instincts, cannot help trying his wit at the outcome of the adventure, though his master is in little mood for sportiveness, steal away as they see lights and hear a commotion in the palace. *Donna Anna* comes back to the garden, bringing her affianced lover, *Don Ottavio*, whom she had called to the help of her father. She finds the *Commandant* dead, and breaks into agonizing cries and tears. Only an accompanied recitative, but every ejaculation a cry of nature! Gounod is wrought up to an ecstasy by Mozart's declamation and harmonies. He suspends his analysis to make this comment: —

But that which one cannot too often remark nor too often endeavor to make understood, that which renders Mozart an absolutely unique genius, is the constant and indissoluble union of beauty of form with truth of expression. By this truth he is human, by this beauty he is

divine. By truth he teaches us, he moves us; we recognize each other in him, and we proclaim thereby that he indeed knows human nature thoroughly, not only in its different passions, but also in the varieties of form and character that those passions may assume. By beauty the real is transfigured, although at the same time it is left entirely recognizable; he elevates it by the magic of a superior language and transports it to that region of serenity and light which constitutes Art, wherein Intelligence repeats with a tranquillity of vision what the heart has experienced in the trouble of passion. Now the union of truth with beauty is Art itself.

Don Ottavio attempts to console his love, but she is insane with grief and at first repulses him, then pours out her grief and calls upon him to avenge the death of her father. Together they register a vow and call on heaven for retribution.

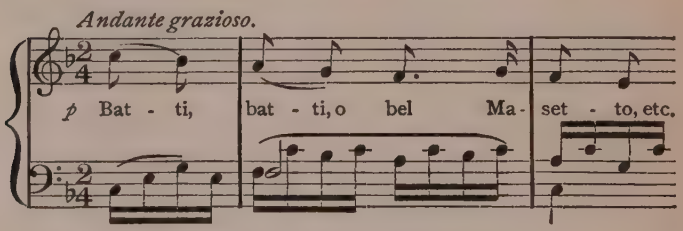
It is morning. *Don Giovanni* and *Leporello* are in the highway near Seville. As usual, *Leporello* is dissatisfied with his service and accuses the *Don* with being a rascal. Threats of punishment bring back his servile manner, and *Don Giovanni* is about to acquaint him of a new conquest, when a lady, *Donna Elvira,* comes upon the scene. She utters woful complaints of unhappiness and resentment against one who had won her love, then deceived and deserted her. (Air: "Ah! chi mi dice mai.") *Don Giovanni* ("aflame already," as *Leporello* remarks) steps forward to console her. He salutes her with soft blandishment in his voice, but to his dismay discovers that she is a noble lady of Burgos and one of the "thousand and three" Spanish victims recorded in the list which *Leporello* mockingly reads

to her after *Don Giovanni*, having turned her over to his servant, for an explanation of his conduct in leaving Burgos, has departed unperceived. *Leporello* is worthy of his master in some things. In danger he is the veriest coward, and his teeth chatter like castanets; but confronted by a mere woman in distress he becomes voluble and spares her nothing in a description of the number of his master's amours, their place, the quality and station of his victims, and his methods of beguilement. The curious and also the emulous may be pleased to learn that the number is 2065, geographically distributed as follows: Italy, 240; Germany, 231; France, 100; Turkey, 91; and Spain, 1003. Among them are ladies from the city and rustic damsels, countesses, baronesses, marchionesses, and princesses. If blond, he praises her dainty beauty; brunette, her constancy; pale, her sweetness. In cold weather his preferences go toward the buxom, in summer, svelte. Even old ladies serve to swell his list. Rich or poor, homely or beautiful, all's one to him so long as the being is inside a petticoat. "But why go on? Lady, you know his ways." The air, "Madamina," is a marvel of malicious humor and musical delineation. "E la grande maestoso" — the music rises and inflates itself most pompously; "la piccina" — it sinks in quick iteration lower and lower just as the Italians in describing small things lower their hands toward the ground. The final words, "Voi sapete, quel che fa," scarcely to be interpreted for polite readers, as given by bass singers who have pre-

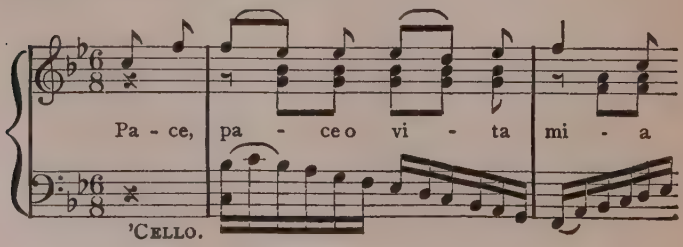
served the Italian traditions (with a final "hm" through the nose), go to the extreme of allowable suggestiveness, if not a trifle beyond. The insult throws *Elvira* into a rage, and she resolves to forego her love and seek vengeance instead.

Don Giovanni comes upon a party of rustics who are celebrating in advance the wedding of *Zerlina* and *Masetto*. The damsel is a somewhat vain, forward, capricious, flirtatious miss, and cannot long withstand such blandishments as the handsome nobleman bestows upon her. *Don Giovanni* sends the merrymakers to his palace for entertainment, cajoles and threatens *Masetto* into leaving him alone with *Zerlina*, and begins his courtship of her. (Duet: "Là ci darem la mano.") He has about succeeded in his conquest, when *Elvira* intervenes, warns the maiden, leads her away, and, returning, finds *Donna Anna* and *Don Ottavio* in conversation with *Don Giovanni*, whose help in the discovery of the *Commandant's* murderer they are soliciting. *Elvira* breaks out with denunciations, and *Don Giovanni*, in a whisper to his companions, proclaims her mad, and leads her off. Departing, he says a word of farewell, and from the tone of his voice *Donna Anna* recognizes her father's murderer. She tells her lover how the assassin stole into her room at night, attempted her dishonor, and slew her father. She demands his punishment at *Don Ottavio's* hands, and he, though doubting that a nobleman and a friend could be guilty of such crimes, yet resolves to find out the truth and deliver the guilty man to justice.

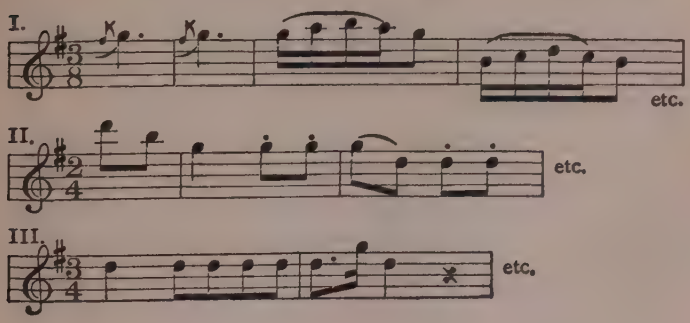
The *Don* commands a grand entertainment for *Zerlina's* wedding party, for, though temporarily foiled, he has not given up the chase. *Masetto* comes with pretty *Zerlina* holding on to the sleeve of his coat. The boor is jealous, and *Zerlina* knows well that he has cause. She protests, she cajoles; he is no match for her. She confesses to having been pleased at my lord's flattery, but he had not touched "even the tips of her fingers." If her fault deserves it, he may beat her if he wants to, but then let there be peace between them. The artful minx! Her wheedling is irresistible. Listen to it:—



The most insinuating of melodies floating over an obbligato of the solo violoncello "like a love charm," as Gounod says. Then the celebration of her victory when she captures one of his hands and knows that he is yielding:—



A new melody, blither, happier, but always the violoncello murmuring in blissful harmony with the seductive voice and rejoicing in the cunning witcheries which lull *Masetto's* suspicions to sleep. Now all go into *Don Giovanni's* palace, from which the sounds of dance music and revelry are floating out. *Donna Elvira, Donna Anna,* and *Don Ottavio,* who come to confront him who has wronged them all, are specially bidden, as was the custom, because they appeared in masks. Within gayety is supreme. A royal host, this *Don Giovanni!* Not only are there refreshments for all, but he has humored both classes of guests in the arrangement of the programme of dances. Let there be a minuet, a country-dance, and an allemande, he had said to *Leporello* in that dizzying song of instruction which whirls past our senses like a mad wind: "Finch' han dal vino." No one so happy as Mozart when it came to providing the music for these dances. Would you connoisseurs in music like counterpoint? We shall give it you; — three dances shall proceed at once and together, despite their warring duple and triple rhythms:—



Louis Viardot, who wrote a little book describing the autograph of "Don Giovanni," says that Mozart wrote in the score where the three bands play thus simultaneously the word *accordano* as a direction to the stage musicians to imitate the action of tuning their instruments before falling in with their music. Of this fact the reprint of the libretto as used at Prague and Vienna contains no mention, but a foot-note gives other stage directions which indicate how desirous Mozart was that his ingenious and humorous conceit should not be overlooked. At the point where the minuet, which was the dance of people of quality, is played, he remarked, "*Don Ottavio* dances the minuet with *Donna Anna*"; at the contra-dance in 2–4 time, "*Don Giovanni* begins to dance a contra-dance with *Zerlina*"; at the entrance of the waltz, "*Leporello* dances a 'Teitsch' with *Masetto*." The proper execution of Mozart's elaborate scheme puts the resources of an opera-house to a pretty severe test, but there is ample reward in the result. Pity that, as a rule, so little intelligence is shown by the ballet master in arranging the dances! There is a special significance in Mozart's direction that the cavalier humor the peasant girl by stepping a country-dance with her, which is all lost when he attempts to lead her into the aristocratic minuet, as is usually done.

At the height of the festivities, *Don Giovanni* succeeds in leading *Zerlina* into an inner room, from which comes a piercing shriek a moment later. Anticipating trouble, *Leporello* hastens to his master

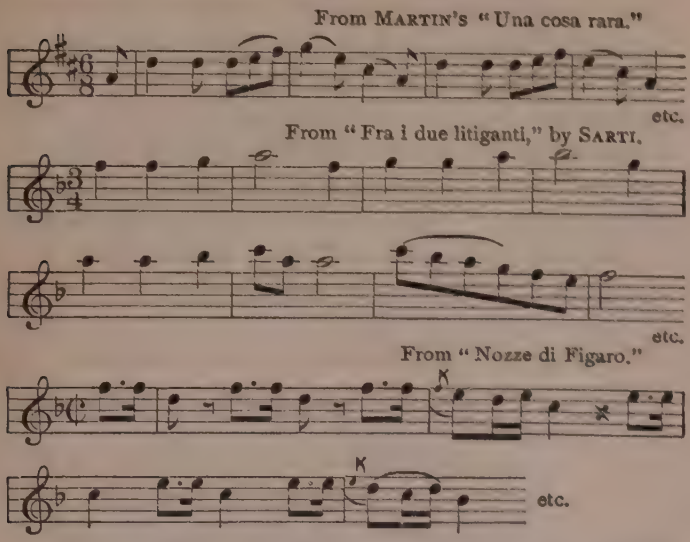
to warn him. *Don Ottavio* and his friends storm the door of the anteroom, out of which now comes *Don Giovanni* dragging *Leporello* and uttering threats of punishment against him. The trick does not succeed. *Don Ottavio* removes his mask and draws his sword; *Donna Anna* and *Donna Elvira* confront the villain. The musicians, servants, and rustics run away in affright. For a moment *Don Giovanni* loses presence of mind, but, his wits and courage returning, he beats down the sword of *Don Ottavio,* and, with *Leporello,* makes good his escape.

The incidents of the second act move with less rapidity, and, until the fateful dénouement is reached, on a lower plane of interest than those of the first, which have been narrated. *Don Giovanni* turns his attentions to the handsome waiting-maid of *Donna Elvira.* To get the mistress out of the way he persuades *Leporello* to exchange cloaks and hats with him and station himself before her balcony window, while he utters words of tenderness and feigned repentance. The lady listens and descends to the garden, where *Leporello* receives her with effusive protestations; but *Don Giovanni* rudely disturbs them, and they run away. Then the libertine, in the habit of his valet, serenades his new charmer. The song, "Deh vieni alla finestra," is of melting tenderness and gallantry; words and music float graciously on the evening air in company with a delightfully piquant tune picked out on a mandolin. The maid is drawn to the window, and *Don Giovanni* is in full expectation of another triumph, when

Masetto confronts him with a rabble of peasants, all armed. They are in search of the miscreant who had attempted to outrage *Zerlina*. *Don Giovanni* is protected by his disguise. He feigns willingness to help in the hunt, and rids himself of *Masetto's* companions by sending them on a fool's errand to distant parts of the garden. Then he cunningly possesses himself of *Masetto's* weapons and belabors him stoutly with his own cudgel. He makes off, and *Zerlina*, hearing *Masetto's* cries, hurries in to heal his hurts with pretty endearments. (Air: "Vedrai carino.") Most unaccountably, as it will seem to those who seek for consistency and reason in all parts of the play, all of its actors except *Don Giovanni* find themselves together in a courtyard (or room, according to the notions of the stage manager). *Leporello* is trying to escape from *Elvira*, who still thinks him *Don Giovanni*, and is first confronted by *Masetto* and *Zerlina* and then by *Ottavio* and *Anna*. He is still in his master's hat and cloak, and is taken vigorously to task, but discloses his identity when it becomes necessary in order to escape a beating. Convinced at last that *Don Giovanni* is the murderer of the *Commandant*, *Don Ottavio* commends his love to the care of her friends and goes to denounce the libertine to the officers of the law.

The last scene is reached. *Don Giovanni*, seated at his table, eats, drinks, indulges in badinage with his servant, and listens to the music of his private band. The musicians play melodies from popular

operas of the period in which Mozart wrote — not Spanish melodies of the unfixed time in which the veritable Don Juan may have lived:—



Mozart feared anachronisms as little as Shakespeare. His *Don Giovanni* was contemporary with himself and familiar with the repertory of the Vienna Opera. The autograph discloses that the ingenious conceit was wholly Mozart's. It was he who wrote the words with which *Leporello* greets the melodies from "Una cosa rara," "I due Litiganti," and "Le Nozze di Figaro," and when *Leporello* hailed the tune "Non piu andrai" from the last opera with the words "Questo poi la conosco pur troppo" ("This we know but too well"), he doubtless scored a point with his first audience in Prague which the

German translator of the opera never dreamed of. Even the German critics of to-day seem dense in their unwillingness to credit Mozart with a purely amiable purpose in quoting the operas of his rivals, Martin and Sarti. The latter showed himself ungrateful for kindnesses received at Mozart's hands by publicly denouncing an harmonic progression in one of the famous six quartets dedicated to Haydn as a barbarism, but there was no ill-will in the use of the air from "I due Litiganti" as supper music for the delectation of the *Don*. Mozart liked the melody, and had written variations on it for the pianoforte.

The supper is interrupted by *Donna Elvira*, who comes to plead on her knees with *Don Giovanni* to change his mode of life. He mocks at her solicitude and invites her to sit with him at table. She leaves the room in despair, but sends back a piercing shriek from the corridor. *Leporello* is sent out to report on the cause of the cry, and returns trembling as with an ague and mumbling that he has seen a ghost — a ghost of stone, whose footsteps, "Ta, ta, ta," sounded like a mighty hammer on the floor. *Don Giovanni* himself goes to learn the cause of the disturbance, and *Leporello* hides under the table. The intrepid *Don* opens the door. There is a clap of thunder, and there enters the ghost of the *Commandant* in the form of his statue as seen in the churchyard. The music which has been described in connection with the overture accompanies the conversation of the spectre and

his amazed host. *Don Giovanni's* repeated offer of hospitality is rejected, but in turn he is asked if he will return the visit. He will. "Your hand as a pledge," says the spectre. All unabashed, the doomed man places his hand in that of the statue, which closes upon it like a vise. Then an awful fear shakes the body of *Don Giovanni*, and a cry of horror is forced out of his lips. "Repent, while there is yet time," admonishes the visitor again and again, and still again. *Don Giovanni* remains unshaken in his wicked fortitude. At length he wrests his hand out of the stony grasp and at the moment hears his doom from the stony lips, "Ah! the time for you is past!" Darkness enwraps him; the earth trembles; supernatural voices proclaim his punishment in chorus; a pit opens before him, from which demons emerge and drag him down to hell.

Here the opera ends for us; but originally, after the catastrophe the persons of the play, all but the reprobate whom divine justice has visited, returned to the scene to hear a description of the awful happenings he had witnessed from the buffoon who had hidden under the table, to dispose their plans for the future (for *Ottavio* and *Anna*, marriage in a year; for *Masetto* and *Zerlina*, a wedding instanter; for *Elvira*, a nunnery), and platitudinously to moralize that, the perfidious wretch having been carried to the realm of Pluto and Proserpine, naught remained to do save to sing the old song, "Thus do the wicked find their end, dying as they had lived."

CHAPTER V

"FIDELIO"

It was the scalawag Schikaneder who had put together the singular dramatic phantasmagoria known as Mozart's "Magic Flute," and acted the part of the buffoon in it, who, having donned the garb of respectability, commissioned Beethoven to compose the only opera which that supreme master gave to the world. The opera is "Fidelio," and it occupies a unique place in operatic history not only because it is the only work of its kind by the greatest tone-poet that ever lived, but also because of its subject. The lyric drama has dealt with the universal passion ever since the art-form was invented, but "Fidelio" is the only living opera which occurs to me now, except Gluck's "Orfeo" and "Alceste," which hymns the pure love of married lovers. The bond between the story of *Alcestis*, who goes down to death to save the life of *Admetus*, and that of *Leonore*, who ventures her life to save *Florestan*, is closer than that of the Orphic myth, for though the alloy only serves to heighten the sheen of Eurydice's virtue, there is yet a grossness in the story of Aristæus's unlicensed passion which led to her death, that strongly differentiates it from the modern tale of wifely love and devotion. Beethoven was

no ascetic, but he was as sincere and severe a moralist in life as he was in art. In that most melancholy of human documents, written at Heiligenstadt in October, 1802, commonly known as his will, he says to his brothers: "Recommend to your children *virtue;* it alone can bring happiness, not money. I speak from experience. It was virtue which bore me up in time of trouble; to her, next to my art, I owe thanks for my not having laid violent hands on myself."

That Mozart had been able to compose music to such libretti as those of "Don Giovanni" and "Così fan tutte" filled him with pained wonder. Moreover, he had serious views of the dignity of music and of the uses to which it might be put in the drama, and more advanced notions than he has generally been credited with as to how music and the drama ought to be consorted. Like all composers, he longed to write an opera, and it is not at all unlikely that, like Mendelssohn after him, he was deterred by the general tendency of the opera books of his day. Certain it is that though he received a commission for an opera early in the year 1803, it was not until an opera on the story which is also that of "Fidelio" had been brought out at Dresden that he made a definitive choice of a subject. The production which may have influenced him was that of Ferdinando Paër's "Leonora, ossia l'Amore conjugale," which was brought forward at Dresden, where its composer was conductor of the opera, on October 3, 1804. This opera was the

immediate predecessor of Beethoven's, but it also had a predecessor in a French opera, "Léonore, ou l'Amour conjugal," of which the music was composed by Pierre Gaveaux, a musician of small but graceful gifts, who had been a tenor singer before he became a composer. This opera had its first performance on February 19, 1798, and may also have been known to Beethoven, or have been brought to his notice while he was casting about for a subject. At any rate, though it was known as early as June, 1803, that Beethoven intended to compose an opera for the Theater an der Wien, and had taken lodgings with his brother Caspar in the theatre building more than two months before, it was not until the winter of 1804 that the libretto of "Fidelio" was placed in his hands. It was a German version of the French book by Bouilly, which had been made by Joseph Sonnleithner, an intimate friend of Schubert, founder of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, who had recently been appointed secretary of the Austrian court theatres as successor of Kotzebue. Beethoven had gone to live in the theatre building for the purpose of working on the opera for Schikaneder, but early in 1804 the Theater an der Wien passed out of his hands into those of Baron von Braun. The intervening summer had been passed by the composer at Baden and Unter Döbling in work upon the "Eroica" symphony. The check upon the operatic project was but temporary. Baron von Braun took Schikaneder into his service and renewed the contract with Beethoven. This accomplished, the

composer resumed his lodgings in the theatre and began energetically to work upon the opera. Let two facts be instanced here to show how energetically and how painstakingly he labored. When he went into the country in the early summer, as was his custom, he carried with him 346 pages of sketches for the opera, sixteen staves on a page; and among these sketches were sixteen openings of *Florestan's* great air, which may be said to mark the beginning of the dramatic action in the opera.

For the rest of the history of the opera I shall draw upon the preface to "Fidelio," which I wrote some years ago for the vocal score in the Schirmer collection. The score was finished, including the orchestration, in the summer of 1805, and on Beethoven's return to Vienna, rehearsals were begun. It was the beginning of a series of trials which made the opera a child of sorrow to the composer. The style of the music was new to the singers, and they pronounced it unsingable. They begged him to make changes, but Beethoven was adamant. The rehearsals became a grievous labor to all concerned. The production was set down for November 20, but when the momentous day came, it found Vienna occupied by the French troops, Bonaparte at Schönbrunn and the capital deserted by the Emperor, the nobility, and most of the wealthy patrons of art. The performance was a failure. Besides the French occupation, two things were recognized as militating against the opera's success: — the music was not to the taste of the people, and the work was too long.

Repetitions followed on November 21 and 22, but the first verdict was upheld.

Beethoven's distress over the failure was scarcely greater than that of his friends, though he was, perhaps, less willing than they to recognize the causes that lay in the work itself. A meeting was promptly held in the house of Prince Lichnowsky and the opera taken in hand for revision. Number by number it was played on the pianoforte, sung, discussed. Beethoven opposed vehemently nearly every suggestion made by his well-meaning friends to remedy the defects of the book and score, but yielded at last and consented to the sacrifice of some of the music and a remodelling of the book for the sake of condensation, this part of the task being intrusted to Stephan von Breuning, who undertook to reduce the original three acts to two.[1] When once Beethoven had been brought to give his consent to the proposed changes, he accepted the result with the greatest good humor; it should be noted, however, that when the opera was put upon the stage again, on March 29, 1806, he was so dilatory with his musical corrections that there was time for only one rehearsal with orchestra. In the curtailed form "Fidelio" (as the opera was called, though Beethoven had fought strenuously from the begin-

[1] As the opera is performed nowadays it is in three acts, but this division is the work of stage managers or directors who treat each of the three scenes as an act. At the Metropolitan Opera House, in New York, Mr. Mahler introduced a division of the first scene into two for what can be said to be merely picturesque effect, since the division is not demanded by the dramatic situation.

ning for the retention of the original title, "Leonore") made a distinctly better impression than it had four months before, and this grew deeper with the subsequent repetitions; but Beethoven quarrelled with Baron von Braun, and the opera was withdrawn. An attempt was made to secure a production in Berlin, but it failed, and the fate of "Fidelio" seemed to be sealed. It was left to slumber for more than seven years; then, in the spring of 1814, it was taken up again. Naturally, another revision was the first thing thought of, but this time the work was intrusted to a more practised writer than Beethoven's childhood friend. Georg Friedrich Treitschke was manager and librettist for Baron von Braun, and he became Beethoven's collaborator. The revision of the book was completed by March, 1814, and Beethoven wrote to Treitschke: "I have read your revision of the opera with great satisfaction. It has decided me to rebuild the desolate ruins of an ancient fortress." Treitschke rewrote much of the libretto, and Beethoven made considerable changes in the music, restoring some of the pages that had been elided at the first overhauling. In its new form "Fidelio" was produced at the Theater am Kärnthnerthor on May 23, 1814. It was a successful reawakening. On July 18 the opera had a performance for Beethoven's benefit; Moscheles made a pianoforte score under the direction of the composer, who dedicated it to his august pupil, the Archduke Rudolph, and it was published in August by Artaria.

The history of "Fidelio," interesting as it is, need not be pursued here further than to chronicle its first performances in the English and American metropoles. London heard it first from Chelard's German company at the King's Theatre on May 18, 1832. It was first given in English at Covent Garden on June 12, 1835, with Malibran as *Leonore*, and in Italian at Her Majesty's on May 20, 1851, when the dialogue was sung in recitative written by Balfe. There has scarcely ever been a German opera company in New York whose repertory did not include "Fidelio," but the only performances for many years after it came were in English. A company of singers brought from England by Miss Inverarity to the Park Theatre produced it first on September 19, 1839. The parts were distributed as follows: *Leonore*, Mrs. Martyn (Miss Inverarity); *Marcellina*, Miss Poole; *Florestan*, Mr. Manvers; *Pizarro*, Mr. Giubilei; and *Rocco*, Mr. Martyn. The opera was performed every night for a fortnight. Such a thing would be impossible now, but lest some one be tempted to rail against the decadent taste of to-day, let it quickly be recorded that somewhere in the opera — I hope not in the dungeon scene — Mme. Giubilei danced a *pas de deux* with Paul Taglioni.

Beethoven composed four overtures for "Fidelio," but a description of them will best follow comment on the drama and its music. Some two years before the incident which marks the beginning of the action, *Don Pizarro*, governor of a state prison in

Spain, not far from Seville, has secretly seized *Florestan*, a political opponent, whose fearless honesty threatened to frustrate his wicked designs, and immured him in a subterranean cell in the prison. His presence there is known only to *Pizarro* and the jailer *Rocco*, who, however, knows neither the name nor the rank of the man whom, under strict command, he keeps in fetters and chained to a stone in the dimly lighted dungeon, which he alone is permitted to visit. *Florestan's* wife, *Leonore*, suspecting the truth, has disguised herself in man's attire and, under the name of *Fidelio*, secured employment in the prison. To win the confidence of *Rocco*, she has displayed so much zeal and industry in his interests that the old man, whose one weakness is a too great love of money, gives the supposed youth a full measure of admiration and affection. *Fidelio's* beauty and gentleness have worked havoc with the heart of *Marcellina*, the jailer's pretty daughter, who is disposed to cast off *Jaquino*, the turnkey, upon whose suit she had smiled till her love for *Fidelio* came between. *Rocco* looks with auspicious eye upon the prospect of having so industrious and thrifty a son-in-law as *Fidelio* promises to be to comfort his old age. The action now begins in the courtyard of the prison, where, before the jailer's lodge, *Marcellina* is performing her household duties — ironing the linen, to be specific. *Jaquino*, who has been watching for an opportunity to speak to her alone (no doubt alarmed at the new posture which his love affair is assuming),

resolves to ask her to marry him. The duet, quite in the Mozartian vein, breathes simplicity throughout; plain people, with plain manners, these, who express simple thoughts in simple language. *Jaquino* begins eagerly:—

JAQUINO (amorously, and rubbing his hands.)

Jetzt, Schätz-chen, jetzt sind wir al - lein,
Now, sweet-heart, at last we're a - lone,

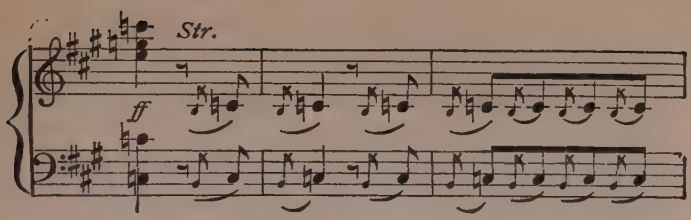
wir kön - nen ver - trau - lich nun plau - dern.
There's time and a plen - ty to chat - ter.

But *Marcellina* affects to be annoyed and urges him to come to the point at once. Quite delicious is the manner in which Beethoven delineates *Jaquino's* timid hesitation:—

Ich — ich ha - be
I — I want - ed

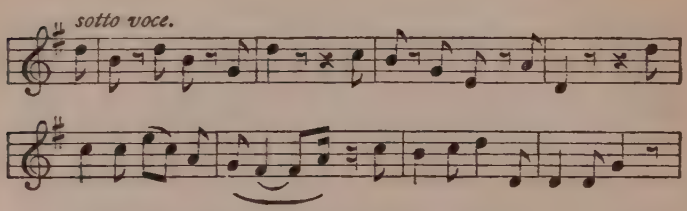
Viola & Basses.

Jaquino's wooing is interrupted by a knocking at the door (realistically reproduced in the music).



and when he goes to open the wicket, *Marcellina* expresses no sympathy for his sufferings, but ecstatically proclaims her love for *Fidelio* as the reason why she must needs say nay. And this she does, not amiably or sympathetically, but pettishly and with an impatient reiteration of "No, no, no, no!" in which the bassoon drolly supports her. A second knocking at the door, then a third, and finally she is relieved of her tormentor by *Rocco*, who calls him out into the garden. Left alone, *Marcellina* sings her longing for *Fidelio* and pictures the domestic bliss which shall follow her union with him. *Rocco* and *Jaquino* enter, and close after them *Leonore*, wearied by the weight of some chains which she had carried to the smith for repairs. She renders an account for purchases of supplies, and her thrift rejoices the heart of *Rocco*, who praises her zeal in his behalf and promises her a reward. Her reply, that she does not do her duty merely for the sake of wage, he interprets as an allusion to love for his daughter. The four now give expression to their thoughts and emotions. *Marcellina* indulges her day-dream of love; *Leonore* reflects upon the dangerous position in which her disguise has placed her; *Jaquino* ob-

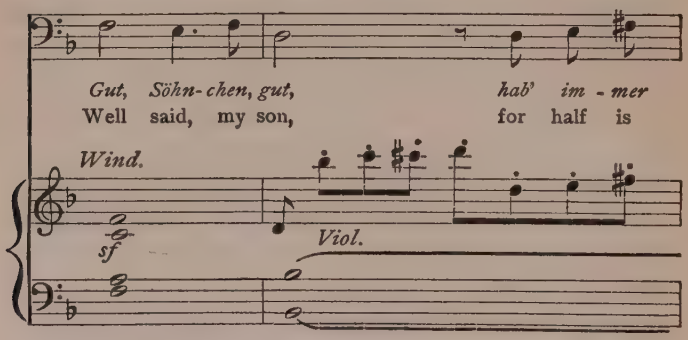
serves with trepidation the disposition of *Rocco* to bring about a marriage between his daughter and *Fidelio*. Varied and contrasting emotions, these, yet Beethoven has cast their expression in the mould of a canon built on the following melody, which is sung in turn by each of the four personages:—



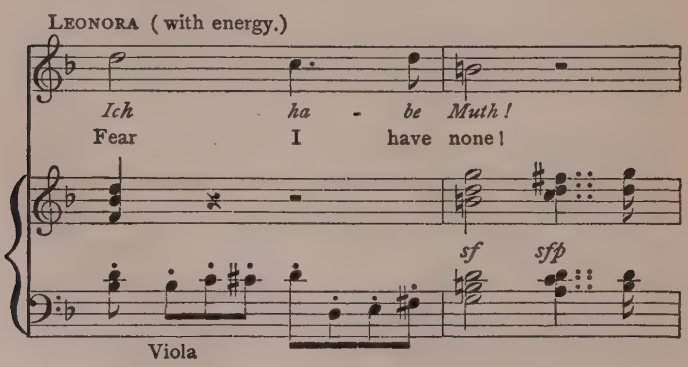
From a strictly musical point of view the fundamental mood of the four personages has thus the same expression, and this Beethoven justifies by making the original utterance profoundly contemplative, not only by the beautiful subject of the canon, but by the exalted instrumental introduction — one of those uplifting, spiritualized slow movements which are typical of the composer. This feeling he enhances by his orchestration — violas and violoncellos divided, and basses — in a way copying the solemn color with more simple means which Mozart uses in his invocation of the Egyptian deities in "The Magic Flute." Having thus established this fundamental mood, he gives liberty of individual utterance in the counterpoint melodies with which each personage embroiders the original theme when sung by the others. Neither *Rocco* nor *Marcellina* seems to think it necessary to consult *Leonore* in

the matter, taking her acquiescence for granted. Between themselves they arrange that the wedding shall take place when next *Pizarro* makes his monthly visit to Seville to give an account of his stewardship, and the jailer admonishes the youthful pair to put money in their purses in a song of little distinction, but containing some delineative music in the orchestra suggesting the rolling and jingling of coins. Having been made seemingly to agree to the way of the maid and her father, *Leonore* seeks now to turn it to the advantage of her mission. She asks and obtains the jailer's permission to visit with him the cells in which political prisoners are kept — all but one, in which is confined one who is either a great criminal or a man with powerful enemies ("much the same thing," comments *Rocco*). Of him even the jailer knows nothing, having resolutely declined to hear his story. However, his sufferings cannot last much longer, for by *Pizarro's* orders his rations are being reduced daily; he has been all but deprived of light, and even the straw which had served as a couch has been taken from him. And how long has he been imprisoned? Over two years. "Two years!" *Leonore* almost loses control of her feelings. Now she urges that she must help the jailer wait upon him. "I have strength and courage." The old man is won over. He will ask the governor for permission to take *Fidelio* with him to the secret cells, for he is growing old, and death will soon claim him. The dramatic nerve has been touched with the first allusion to the mysterious

prisoner who is being slowly tortured to death, and it is thrilling to note how Beethoven's genius (so often said to be purely epical) responds. In the trio which follows, the dialogue which has been outlined first intones a *motif* which speaks merely of com-

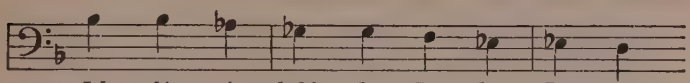


placency. No sooner does it reach the lips of *Leonore*, however, than it becomes the utterance of proud resolve: —



and out of it grows a hymn of heroic daring. *Marcellina's* utterances are all concerned with her-

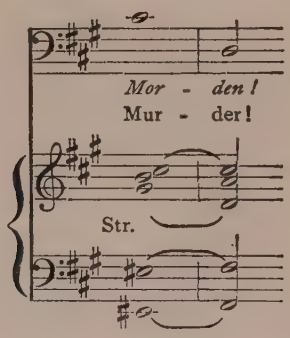
self, with an admixture of solicitude for her father, whose lugubrious reflections on his own impending dissolution are gloomily echoed in the music: —



A march accompanies the entrance of *Pizarro.*[1] *Pizarro* receives his despatches from *Rocco,* and from one of the letters learns that the *Minister of Justice,* having been informed that several victims of arbitrary power are confined in the prisons of which he is governor, is about to set out upon a tour of inspection. Such a visit might disclose the wrong done to *Florestan,* who is the *Minister's* friend and believed by him to be dead, and *Pizarro* resolves to shield himself against the consequences of such a discovery by compassing his death. He publishes his resolution in a furious air, "Ha! welch' ein Augenblick!" in which he gloats over the culmination of his revenge upon his ancient enemy. It is a terrible outpouring of bloodthirsty rage, and I have yet to hear the singer who can cope with its awful accents. Here, surely, Beethoven asks more of the human voice than it is capable of giving. Quick action is necessary. The officer of the guard is ordered to post a

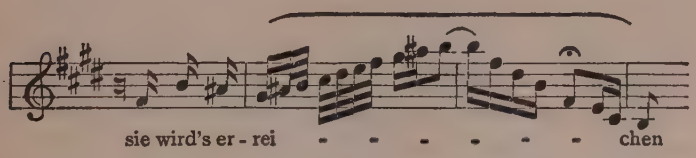
[1] In Mr. Mahler's arrangement this march becomes *entr'acte* music to permit of a change of scene from the interior of the jailer's lodge to the courtyard of the prison prescribed in the book.

trumpeter in the watch-tower, with instructions to give a signal the moment a carriage with outriders is seen approaching from Seville. *Rocco* is summoned, and *Pizarro*, praising his courage and fidelity to duty, gives him a purse as earnest of riches which are to follow obedience. The old man is ready enough until he learns that what is expected of him is



whereupon he revolts, nor is he moved by *Pizarro's* argument that the deed is demanded by the welfare of the state. Foiled in his plan of hiring an assassin, *Pizarro* announces that he will deal the blow himself, and commands that a disused cistern be opened to receive the corpse of his victim. The duet which is concerned with these transactions is full of striking effects. The orchestra accompanies *Rocco's* description of the victim as "one who scarcely lives, but seems to float like a shadow" with chords which spread a cold, cadaverous sheen over the words, while the declamation of "A blow!—and he is dumb," makes illustrative pantomime unnecessary.

Leonore has overheard all, and rushes forward on the departure of the men to express her horror at the wicked plot, and proclaim her trust in the guidance and help of love as well as her courageous resolve to follow its impulses and achieve the rescue of the doomed man. The scene and air in which she does this ("Abscheulicher! wo eilst du hin?") is now a favorite concert-piece of all dramatic singers; but when it was written its difficulties seemed appalling to Fräulein Milder (afterward the famous Frau Milder-Hauptmann), who was the original *Leonore.* A few years before Haydn had said to her, "My dear child, you have a voice as big as a house," and a few years later she made some of her finest successes with the part; but in the rehearsals she quarrelled violently with Beethoven because of the unsingableness of passages in the *Adagio*, of which, no doubt, this was one:—

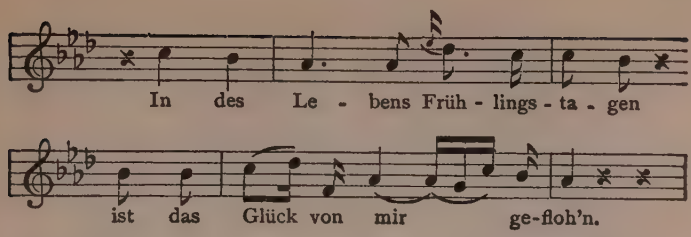


and when called upon, in 1814, to re-create the part which had been written expressly for her, she refused until Beethoven had consented to modify it. Everything is marvellous in the *scena* — the mild glow of orchestral color delineating the bow of promise in the recitative, the heart-searching, transfigurating, prayerful loveliness of the slow

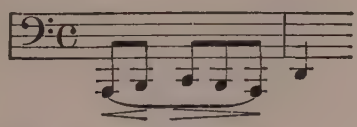
melody, the *obbligato* horn parts, the sweep of the final *Allegro*, all stand apart in operatic literature.

At *Leonore's* request, and presuming upon the request which *Pizarro* had made of him, *Rocco* permits the prisoners whose cells are above ground to enjoy the light and air of the garden, defending his action later, when taken to task by *Pizarro*, on the plea that he was obeying established custom in allowing the prisoners a bit of liberty on the name-day of the king. In an undertone he begs his master to save his anger for the man who is doomed to die. Meanwhile *Leonore* convinces herself that her husband is not among the prisoners who are enjoying the brief respite, and is overjoyed to learn that she is to accompany *Rocco* that very day to the mysterious subterranean dungeon. With the return of the prisoners to their cells, the first act ends.

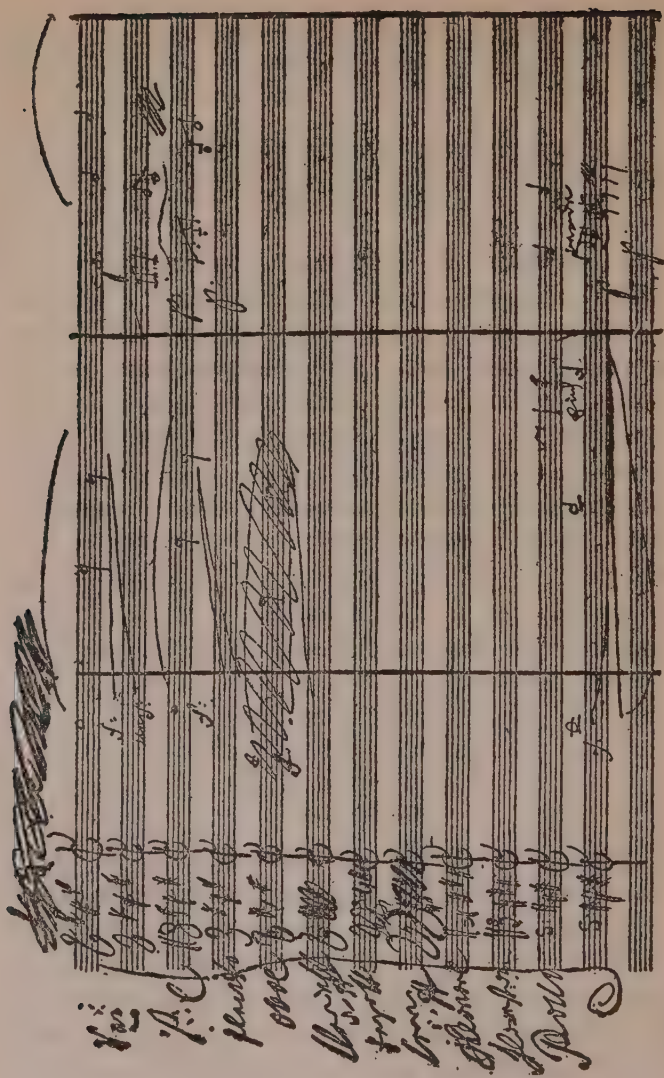
An instrumental introduction ushers in the second act. It is a musical delineation of *Florestan's* surroundings, sufferings, and mental anguish. The darkness is rent by shrieks of pain; harsh, hollow, and threatening sound the throbs of the kettle-drums. The parting of the curtain discloses the prisoner chained to his rocky couch. He declaims against the gloom, the silence, the deathly void surrounding him, but comforts himself with the thought that his sufferings are but the undeserved punishment inflicted by an enemy for righteous duty done. The melody of the slow part of his air, which begins thus,



will find mention again when the overtures come under discussion. His sufferings have overheated his fancy, and, borne upon cool and roseate breezes, he sees a vision of his wife, *Leonore,* come to comfort and rescue him. His exaltation reaches a frenzy which leaves him sunk in exhaustion on his couch. *Rocco* and *Leonore* come to dig his grave. Melodramatic music accompanies their preparation, and their conversation while at work forms a duet. Sustained trombone tones spread a portentous atmosphere, and a contra-bassoon adds weight and solemnity to the *motif* which describes the labor of digging:—



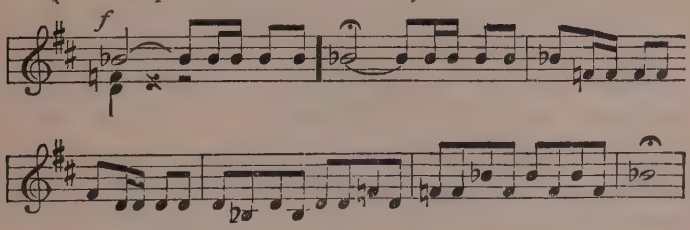
They have stopped to rest and refresh themselves, when *Florestan* becomes conscious and addresses *Rocco. Leonore* recognizes his voice as that of her husband, and when he pleads for a drink of water, she gives him, with *Rocco's* permission, the wine left in her pitcher, then a bit of bread. A world of pathos informs his song of gratitude.



Facsimile of Beethoven's Ms. Beginning of the Trio in the Dungeon Scene of "Fidelio."

Pizarro comes to commit the murder, but first he commands that the boy be sent away, and confesses his purpose to make way with both *Fidelio* and *Rocco* when once the deed is done. He cannot resist the temptation to disclose his identity to *Florestan*, who, though released from the stone, is still fettered. The latter confronts death calmly, but as *Pizarro* is about to plunge the dagger into his breast, *Leonore* (who had concealed herself in the darkness) throws herself as a protecting shield before him. *Pizarro*, taken aback for a moment, now attempts to thrust *Leonore* aside, but is again made to pause by her cry, "First kill his wife!" Consternation and amazement seize all and speak out of their ejaculations. Determined to kill both husband and wife, *Pizarro* rushes forward again, only to see a pistol thrust into his face, hear a shriek, "Another word, and you are dead!" and immediately after the trumpet signal which, by his own command, announces the coming of the *Minister of Justice:*—

(The trumpet sounds from the tower.)



Pizarro is escorted out of the dungeon by *Rocco* and attendants with torches, and the reunited lovers are left to themselves and their frenetic

rejoicings. Surrounded by his guard, the populace attracted by his coming, and the prisoners into whose condition he had come to inquire, *Don Fernando* metes out punishment to the wicked *Pizarro*, welcomes his old friend back to liberty and honor, and bids *Leonore* remove his fetters as the only person worthy of such a task. The populace hymn wifely love and fidelity.

Mention has been made of the fact that Beethoven wrote four overtures for his opera. Three of these are known as Overtures "Leonore No. 1," "Leonore No. 2," and "Leonore No. 3" — "Leonore" being the title by which the opera was known at the unfortunate first performance. The composer was never contented with the change to "Fidelio" which was made, because of the identity of the story with the "Leonore" operas, of Gaveaux and Paër. Much confusion has existed in the books (and still exists, for that matter) touching the order in which the four overtures were composed. The early biographers were mistaken on that point, and the blunder was perpetuated by the numbering when the scores were published. The true "Leonore No. 1" is the overture known in the concert-room, where it is occasionally heard, as "Leonore No. 2." This was the original overture to the opera, and was performed at the three representations in 1805. The overture called "Leonore No. 3" was the result of the revision undertaken by Beethoven and his friends after the failure. In May, 1807, the German opera at Prague was estab-

lished and "Fidelio" selected as one of the works to be given. Evidently Beethoven was dissatisfied both with the original overture and its revision, for he wrote a new one, in which he retained the theme from *Florestan's* air, but none of the other themes used in Nos. 2 and 3. The performances at Prague did not take place, and nobody knows what became of the autograph score of the overture. When Beethoven's effects were sold at auction after his death, Tobias Haslinger bought a parcel of dances and other things in manuscript. Among them were a score and parts of an overture in C, not in Beethoven's handwriting, but containing corrections made by him. It bore no date, and on a violin part Beethoven had written first "Overtura, Violino Imo." Later he had added words in red crayon to make it read, "Overtura in C, charakteristische Overture, Violino Imo." On February 7, 1828, the composition was played at a concert in Vienna, but notwithstanding the reminiscence of *Florestan's* air, it does not seem to have been associated with the opera, either by Haslinger or the critics. Before 1832, when Haslinger published the overture as Op. 138, however, it had been identified, and, not unnaturally, the conclusion was jumped at that it was the original overture. That known as "Leonore No. 2" having been withdrawn for revision by Beethoven himself, was not heard of till 1840, when it was performed at a Gewandhaus concert in Leipsic. For the revival of the opera in 1814 Beethoven composed the overture in E major, now called the "Fidelio"

overture, and generally played as an introduction to the opera, the much greater "Leonore No. 3" being played either between the acts, or, as by Mahler in New York and Vienna, between the two scenes of the second act, where it may be said it distinctly has the effect of an anticlimax. The thematic material of the "Leonore" overtures Nos. 2 and 3 being practically the same, careless listeners may easily confound one with the other. Nevertheless, the differences between the two works are many and great, and a deep insight into the workings of Beethoven's mind would be vouchsafed students if they were brought into juxtaposition in the concert-room. The reason commonly given for the revision of No. 2 (the real No. 1) is that at the performance it was found that some of the passages for wind instruments troubled the players; but among the changes made by Beethoven, all of which tend to heighten the intensity of the overture which presents the drama *in nuce*, may be mentioned the elision of a recurrence to material drawn from his principal theme between the two trumpet-calls, and the abridgment of the development or free fantasia portion. Finally, it may be stated that though the "Fidelio" overture was written for the revival of 1814, it was not heard at the first performance in that year. It was not ready, and the overture to "The Ruins of Athens" was played in its stead.

CHAPTER VI

"FAUST"

MM. MICHEL CARRÉ and Jules Barbier, who made the book for Gounod's opera "Faust," went for their subject to Goethe's dramatic poem. Out of that great work, which had occupied the mind of the German poet for an ordinary lifetime, the French librettists extracted the romance which sufficed them — the story of *Gretchen's* love for the rejuvenated philosopher, her seduction and death. This romance is wholly the creation of Goethe; it has no place in any of the old legends which are at the bottom of the history of Dr. Faust, or Faustus. Those legends deal with the doings of a magician who has sold his soul to the devil for the accomplishment of some end on which his ambition is set. There are many such legends in mediæval literature, and their fundamental thought is older than Christianity. In a sense, the idea is a product of ignorance and superstition combined. In all ages men whose learning and achievements were beyond the comprehension of simple folk were thought to have derived their powers from the practice of necromancy. The list is a long one, and includes some of the great names of antiquity. The imagination of the Middle Ages made bondsmen of the infernal powers

out of such men as Zoroaster, Democritus, Empedocles, Apollonius, Virgil, Albertus Magnus, Merlin, and Paracelsus. In the sixth century Theophilus of Syracuse was said to have sold himself to the devil and to have been saved from damnation only by the miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary, who visited hell and bore away the damnable compact. So far as his bond was concerned, Theophilus was said to have had eight successors among the Popes of Rome.

Architects of cathedrals and engineers of bridges were wont, if we believe popular tales, to barter their souls in order to realize their great conceptions. How do such notions get into the minds of the people? I attempted not an answer but an explanation in a preface to Gounod's opera published by Schirmer some years ago, which is serving me a good turn now. For the incomprehensible the supernatural is the only accounting. These things are products of man's myth-making capacity and desire. With the advancement of knowledge this capacity and desire become atrophied, but spring into life again in the presence of a popular stimulant. The superstitious peasantry of Bavaria beheld a man in league with the devil in the engineer who ran the first locomotive engine through that country. More recently, I am told, the same people conceived the notion that the Prussian needle-gun, which had wrought destruction among their soldiery in the war of 1866, was an infernal machine for which Bismarck had given the immortal part of himself.

When printing was invented, it was looked upon in a double sense as a black art, and it was long and widely believed that Johann Fust, or Faust, of Mayence, the partner of Gutenberg, was the original Dr. Johann Faustus (the prototype of Goethe's *Faust*), who practised magic toward the end of the fifteenth and at the beginning of the sixteenth century, made a compact with Mephistopheles, performed many miraculous feats, and died horribly at the last. But Fust, or Faust, was a rich and reputable merchant of Mayence who provided capital to promote the art of Gutenberg and Schöffer, and Mr. H. Sutherland Edwards, who gossips pleasantly and at great length about the Faust legends in Volume I of his book, "The Lyrical Drama," indulges a rather wild fancy when he considers it probable that he was the father of the real mediæval incarnation of the ancient superstition. The real Faust had been a poor lad, but money inherited from a rich uncle enabled him to attend lectures at the University of Cracow, where he seems to have devoted himself with particular assiduity to the study of magic, which had at that period a respectable place in the curriculum. Having obtained his doctorial hat, he travelled through Europe practising necromancy and acquiring a thoroughly bad reputation. To the fact that this man actually lived, and lived such a life as has been described, we have the testimony of a physician, Philip Begardi; a theologian, Johann Gast, and no less a witness than Philip Melanchthon, the reformer. Martin Luther

refers to Faust in his "Table Talk" as a man lost beyond all hope of redemption; Melanchthon, who says that he talked with him, adds: "This sorcerer Faust, an abominable beast, a common sewer of many devils (*turpissima bestia et cloaca multorum diabolorum*), boasted that he had enabled the imperial armies to win their victories in Italy."

The literary history of Faust is much too long to be even outlined here; a few points must suffice us. In a book published in Frankfort in 1587 by a German writer named Spiess, the legend received its first printed form. An English ballad on the subject appeared within a year. In 1590 there came a translation of the entire story, which was the source from which Marlowe drew his "Tragical History of the Life and Death of Dr. Faustus," brought forward on the stage in 1593 and printed in 1604. New versions of the legend followed each other rapidly, and Faust became a favorite character with playwrights, romancers, and poets. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, when Goethe conceived the idea of utilizing the subject for publishing his comprehensive philosophy of human life, it seems to have held possession of a large portion of literary Germany. All together, it was in the mind of the great poet from his adolescence till his death; but while he was working on his original plan, literary versions of the legend were published by twenty-eight German authors, including Lessing, whose manuscript, unhappily, was lost. Goethe had known the legend from

childhood, when he had seen puppet-plays based on it — these plays being the vulgar progeny of Marlowe's powerful tragedy, which is still an ornament of English literature. Music was a part of these puppet-plays. In the first one that fell into my hands I find the influence of opera manifest in recitatives and airs put into the mouth of *Mephistopheles*, and comic songs sung by *Kasperle*, the *Punch* of the German marionette fraternity.

The love tale which furnished forth the entire opera book of MM. Carré and Barbier is, as I have said, wholly the invention of Goethe. There is the shadowy form of a maiden in some of the versions of the legend, but not a hint of the romantic sentiment so powerfully and pathetically set forth by the poet. Nor did the passion either for good or evil play a part in the agreement between Faust and the devil. That agreement covered five points only: Faust pledged himself to deny God, hate the human race, despise the clergy, never set foot in a church, and never get married. So far from being a love episode in the story, when Faustus, in the old book by Spiess, once expressed a wish to abrogate the last condition, Mephistopheles refused him permission on the ground that marriage is something pleasing to God, and for that reason in contravention of the contract. "Hast thou," quoth Mephistopheles, "sworn thyself an enemy to God and to all creatures? To this I answer thee, thou canst not marry; thou canst not serve two masters, God and thy prince. For wedlock is a chief

institution ordained of God, and that thou hast promised to defy as we do all, and that thou hast not only done, but, moreover, thou hast confirmed it with thy blood. Persuade thyself that what thou hast done in contempt of wedlock, it is all to thine own delight. Therefore, Faustus, look well about thee and bethink thyself better, and I wish thee to change thy mind, for if thou keep not what thou hast promised in thy writing, we will tear thee in pieces, like the dust under thy feet. Therefore, sweet Faustus, think with what unquiet life, anger, strife, and debate thou shalt live in when thou takest a wife. Therefore, change thy mind." Faustus abandons his purpose for the time being, but within two hours summons his spirit again and demands his consent to marriage; whereupon up there comes a whirlwind, which fills the house with fire and smoke and hurls Faustus about until he is unable to stir hand or foot. Also there appears an ugly devil, so dreadful and monstrous to behold that Faustus dares not look upon him. This devil is in a mood for jesting. "How likest thou thy wedding?" he asks of Faustus, who promises not to mention marriage more, and is well content when Mephistopheles engages to bring him any woman, dead or alive, whom he may desire to possess. It is in obedience to this promise that Helen of Troy is brought back from the world of shades to be Faustus's paramour. By her he has a son, whom he calls Justus Faustus, but in the end, when Faustus loses his life, mother and child vanish. Goethe uses the

scene of the amour between Faust and the ancient beauty in the second part of his poem as does Boito in his "Mefistofele," charging it with the beautiful symbolism which was in the German poet's mind. In the Polish tale of Pan Twardowsky, built on the lines of the old legend, there is a more amusing fling at marriage. In return for the help which he is to receive, the Polish wizard has the privilege of demanding three duties of the devil. After enjoying to the full the benefits conferred by two, he commands the devil to marry Mme. Twardowska. This is more than the devil had bargained for, or is willing to perform. He refuses; the contract is broken, and Twardowsky is saved. The story may have inspired Thackeray's amusing tale in "The Paris Sketch-book," entitled "The Painter's Bargain."

For the facts in the story of the composition and production of Gounod's opera, we have the authority of the composer in his autobiography. In 1856 he made the acquaintance of Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, and asked them to collaborate with him in an opera. They assenting, he proposed Goethe's "Faust" as a subject, and it met with their approval. Together they went to see M. Carvalho, who was then director of the Théâtre Lyrique. He, too, liked the idea of the opera, and the librettists went to work. The composer had written nearly half of the score, when M. Carvalho brought the disconcerting intelligence that a grand melodrama treating the subject was in preparation at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin. Carvalho said that

it would be impossible to get the opera ready before the appearance of the melodrama, and unwise to enter into competition with a theatre the luxury of whose stage mounting would have attracted all Paris before the opera could be produced. Carvalho therefore advised a change of subject, which was such a blow to Gounod that he was incapable of applying himself to work for a week. Finally, Carvalho came to the rescue with a request for a lyric comedy based on one of Molière's plays. Gounod chose "Le Médecin malgré lui," and the opera had its production at the Théâtre Lyrique on the anniversary of Molière's birth, January 15, 1858. The melodrama at the Porte Saint-Martin turned out to be a failure in spite of its beautiful pictures, and Carvalho recurred to the opera, which had been laid aside, and Gounod had it ready by July. He read it to the director in the greenroom of the theatre in that month, and Mme. Carvalho, wife of the director, who was present, was so deeply impressed with the rôle of *Marguerite* that M. Carvalho asked the composer's permission to assign it to her. "This was agreed upon," says Gounod, "and the future proved the choice to be a veritable inspiration."

Rehearsals began in September, 1858, and soon developed difficulties. Gounod had set his heart upon a handsome young tenor named Guardi for the titular rôle, but he was found to be unequal to its demands. This caused such embarrassment that, it is said, Gounod, who had a pretty voice and was

rather fond of showing it, seriously pondered the feasibility of singing it himself. He does not tell us this in his autobiography, but neither does he tell us that he had chosen Mme. Ugalde for the part of *Marguerite*, and that he yielded to M. Carvalho in giving it to the director's wife because Mme. Ugalde had quarrelled with him (as prima donnas will), about Massé's opera, "La Fée Carabosse," which preceded "Faust" at the Lyrique. The difficulty about the tenor rôle was overcome by the enlistment of M. Barbot, an artist who had been a companion of Carvalho's when he sang small parts at the Opéra Comique. He was now far past his prime, and a pensioned teacher at the Conservatoire, but Gounod bears witness that he "showed himself a great musician in the part of *Faust*." Of Belanqué, who created the part of *Méphistophélès*, Gounod says that "he was an intelligent comedian whose play, physique, and voice lent themselves wonderfully to this fantastic and Satanic personage." As for Mme. Carvalho, it was the opinion of the composer that, though her masterly qualities of execution and style had already placed her in the front rank of contemporary singers, no rôle, till *Marguerite* fell to her lot, had afforded her opportunity to show in such measure "the superior phases of her talent, so sure, so refined, so steady, so tranquil — its lyric and pathetic qualities."

It was a distinguished audience that listened to the first performance of "Faust" on March 19, 1859. Auber, Berlioz, Reyer, Jules Janin, Perrin,

Émile Ollivier, and many other men who had made their mark in literature, art, or politics sat in the boxes, and full as many more of equal distinction in the stalls. Among these latter were Delacroix, Vernet, Eugène Giraud, Pasdeloup, Scudo, Heugel, and Jules Lévy. The criticism of the journals which followed was, as usual, a blending of censure and praise. Berlioz was favorably inclined toward the work, and, with real discrimination, put his finger on the monologue at the close of the third act ("Il m'aime! Quel trouble en mon cœur") as the best thing in the score. Scudo gave expression to what was long the burden of the critical song in Germany; namely, the failure of the authors to grasp the large conception of Goethe's poem; but, with true Gallic inconsistency, he set down the soldiers' chorus as a masterpiece. The garden scene, with its sublimated mood, its ecstasy of feeling, does not seem to have moved him; he thought the third act monotonous and too long. There was no demand for the score on the part of the French publishers, but at length Choudens was persuaded to adventure 10,000 francs, one-half of an inheritance, in it. He was at that time an *éditeur* on a small scale, as well as a postal official, and the venture put him on the road to fortune. For the English rights Gounod is said to have received only forty pounds sterling, and this only after the energetic championship of Chorley, who made the English translation. The opera was given thirty-seven times at the Théâtre Lyrique. Ten years after its

first performance it was revised to fit the schemes of the Grand Opéra, and brought forward under the new auspices on March 3, 1869. Mlle. Christine Nilsson was the new *Marguerite.* No opera has since equalled the popularity of "Faust" in Paris. Twenty-eight years after its first performance, Gounod was privileged to join his friends in a celebration of its 500th representation. That was in 1887. Eight years after, the 1000 mark was reached, and the 1250th Parisian representation took place in 1902.

Two years before "Faust" reached London, it was given in Germany, where it still enjoys great popularity, though it is called "Margarethe," in deference to the *manes* of Goethe. Within a few weeks in 1863 the opera had possession of two rival establishments in London. At Her Majesty's Theatre it was given for the first time on June 11, and at the Royal Italian Opera on July 2. On January 23, 1864, it was brought forward in Mr. Chorley's English version at Her Majesty's. The first American representation took place at the Academy of usic, New York, on November 25, 1863, the parts being distributed as follows: *Margherita,* Miss Clara Louise Kellogg; *Siebel,* Miss Henrietta Sulzer; *Martha,* Miss Fanny Stockton; *Faust,* Francesco Mazzoleni; *Mephistopheles,* Hanibal Biachi; *Valentine,* G. Yppolito; *Wagner,* D. Coletti. It was sung in Italian, won immediate popularity, and made money for Max Maretzek, who was at once the manager and the conductor of the company. Forty years before

an English version of Goethe's tragedy (the first part, of course) had been produced at the Bowery Theatre, with the younger Wallack as *Faust* and Charles Hill as *Mephistopheles*.

The opera begins, like Goethe's dramatic poem, after the prologue, with the scene in *Faust's* study. The aged philosopher has grown weary of fruitless inquiry into the mystery of nature and its Creator, and longs for death. He has just passed a night in study, and as the morning breaks he salutes it as his last on earth and pledges it in a cup of poison. As he is about to put the cup to his lips, the song of a company of maidens floats in at the window. It tells of the joy of living and loving and the beauty of nature and its inspirations. *Faust's* hand trembles, strangely, unaccountably; again he lifts the cup, but only to pause again to listen to a song sung by a company of reapers repairing to the fields, chanting their gratitude to God for the loveliness surrounding them, and invoking His blessing. The sounds madden the despairing philosopher. What would prayer avail him? Would it bring back youth and love and faith? No. Accursed, therefore, be all things good — earth's pleasures, riches, allurements of every sort; the dreams of love; the wild joy of combat; happiness itself; science, religion, prayers, belief; above all, a curse upon the patience with which he had so long endured! He summons Satan to his aid. *Méphistophélès* answers the call, in the garb of a cavalier. His tone and bearing irritate *Faust*, who bids him begone. The fiend

would know his will, his desires. Gold, glory, power? — all shall be his for the asking. But these things are not the heart's desire of *Faust*. He craves youthfulness, with its desires and delights, its passions and puissance. *Méphistophélès* promises all, and, when he hesitates, inflames his ardor with a vision of the lovely *Marguerite* seated at her spinning-wheel. Eagerly *Faust* signs the compact — the devil will serve *Faust* here, but below the relations shall be reversed. *Faust* drinks a pledge to the vision, which fades away. In a twinkling the life-weary sage is transformed into a young man, full of eager and impatient strength.

Méphistophélès loses no time in launching *Faust* upon his career of adventures. First, he leads him to a fair in a mediæval town. Students are there who sing the pleasures of drinking; soldiers, too, bent on conquest — of maidens or fortresses, all's one to them; old burghers, who find delight in creature comforts; maids and matrons, flirtatious and envious. All join in the merriest of musical hubbubs. *Valentin*, a soldier who is about to go to the wars, commends his sister *Marguerite* to the care of *Siebel*, a gentle youth who loves her. *Wagner*, a student, begins a song, but is interrupted by *Méphistophélès*, who has entered the circle of merry-makers with *Faust*, and who now volunteers to sing a better song than the one just begun. He sings of the Calf of Gold ("Le veau d'or est toujours debout"), and the crowd delightedly shouts the refrain. The singer accepts a cup of wine, but, find-

ing it not at all to his taste, he causes vintages to the taste of every one to flow from the cask which serves as a tavern sign. He offers the company a toast, "To *Marguerite!*" and when *Valentin* attempts to resent the insult to his sister with his sword, it breaks in his hand as he tries to penetrate a magic circle which *Méphistophélès* draws around himself. The men now suspect the true character of their singular visitor, and turn the cruciform hilts of their swords against him, to his intense discomfort. With the return of the women the merrymaking is resumed. All join in a dance, tripping it gayly to one waltz sung by the spectators and another which rises simultaneously from the instruments. *Marguerite* crosses the market-place on her way home from church. *Faust* offers her his arm, but she declines his escort — not quite so rudely as Goethe's *Gretchen* does in the corresponding situation. *Faust* becomes more than ever enamoured of the maiden, whom he had seen in the vision conjured up in the philosopher's study.

Méphistophélès is a bit amused at *Faust's* first attempt at wooing, and undertakes to point the way for him. He leads him into the garden surrounding the cottage in which *Marguerite* dwells. *Siebel* had just been there and had plucked a nosegay for the maiden of his heart, first dipping his fingers in holy water to protect them from the curse which *Méphistophélès* had pronounced against them while parading as a fortune-teller at the fair. *Faust* is lost in admiration at sight of the humble

abode of loveliness and innocence, and lauds it in a romance ("Salut! demeure chaste et pure"), but is taken aside by *Méphistophélès*, who gives warning of the approach of *Marguerite*, and places a casket of jewels beside the modest bouquet left by *Siebel*. *Marguerite*, seated at her spinning-wheel, alternately sings a stanza of a ballad ("Il était un Roi de Thule") and speaks her amazed curiosity concerning the handsome stranger who had addressed her in the market-place. She finds the jewels, ornaments herself with them, carolling her delight the while, and admiring the regal appearance which the gems lend her.

Here I should like to be pardoned a brief digression. Years ago, while the German critics were resenting the spoliation of the masterpiece of their greatest poet by the French librettists, they fell upon this so-called Jewel Song ("Air des bijoux," the French call it), and condemned its brilliant and ingratiating waltz measures as being out of keeping with the character of *Gretchen*. In this they forgot that *Marguerite* and *Gretchen* are very different characters indeed. There is much of the tender grace of the unfortunate German maiden in the creation of the French authors, but none of her simple, almost rude, rusticity. As created by, let me say, Mme. Carvalho and perpetuated by Christine Nilsson and the painter Ary Scheffer, *Marguerite* is a good deal of a *grande dame*, and against the German critics it might appositely be pleaded that there are more traces of childish ingenuousness in her rejoicing over the casket of jewels than in any

of her other utterances. The episode is poetically justified, of course, by the eighth scene of Goethe's drama, and there was not wanting one German writer who boldly came to the defence of *Marguerite* on the ground that she moved on a higher moral plane than *Gretchen.* The French librettists, while they emptied the character of much of its poetical contents, nevertheless made it in a sense more gentle, and Gounod refined it still more by breathing an ecstasy into all of its music. Goethe's *Gretchen,* though she rejects *Faust's* first advances curtly enough to be called impolite, nevertheless ardently returns *Faust's* kiss on her first meeting with him in the garden, and already at the second (presumably) offers to leave her window open, and accepts the sleeping potion for her mother. It is a sudden, uncontrollable rush of passion to which *Marguerite* succumbs. *Gretchen* remains in simple amaze that such a fine gentleman as *Faust* should find anything to admire in her, even after she has received and returned his first kiss; but *Marguerite* is exalted, transfigured by the new feelings surging within her.

> Il m'aime! quel trouble en mon cœur!
> L'oiseau chante! Le vent murmure!
> Toutes les voix de la nature
> Semblent me répéter en chœur:
> Il t'aime!

I resume the story. *Martha,* the neighborhood gossip, comes to encourage *Marguerite* in a belief which she scarcely dares cherish, that the jewels had been left for her by some noble admirer, and

her innocent pleasure is interrupted by the entrance of *Faust* and *Méphistophélès*. The latter draws *Martha* away, and *Faust* wooes the maiden with successful ardor. They have indulged in their first embrace, and said their farewells till to-morrow: *Faust* is about to depart, when *Méphistophélès* detains him and points to *Marguerite*, who is burdening the perfumed air with her new ecstasy. He rushes to her, and, with a cry of delight, she falls into his arms.

Goethe's scene at the fountain becomes, in the hands of the French librettists, a scene in the chamber of *Marguerite*. The deceived maiden is cast down by the jeers and mockings of her erstwhile companions, and comforted by *Siebel*. It is now generally omitted. *Marguerite* has become the talk of the town, and evil reports reach the ear of her brother *Valentin* on his return from the wars with the victorious soldiery. *Valentin* confronts *Faust* and *Méphistophélès* while the latter is singing a ribald serenade at *Marguerite's* door. The men fight, and, through the machinations of *Méphistophélès*, *Valentin* is mortally wounded. He dies denouncing the conduct of *Marguerite*, and cursing her for having brought death upon him. *Marguerite* seeks consolation in religious worship; but the fiend is at her elbow even in the holy fane, and his taunts and the accusing chant of a choir of demons interrupt her prayers. The devil reveals himself in his proper (or improper) person at the end, and *Marguerite* falls in a swoon.

The Walpurgis night scene of Goethe furnished the suggestion for the ballet which fills the first three scenes of the fifth act, and which was added to the opera when it was remodelled for the Grand Opéra in 1869. The scene holds its place in Paris, but is seldom performed elsewhere. A wild scene in the Harz Mountains gives way to an enchanted hall in which are seen the most famous courtesans of ancient history — Phryne, Laïs, Aspasia, Cleopatra, and Helen of Troy. The apparition of *Marguerite* appears to *Faust*, a red line encircling her neck, like the mark of a headsman's axe. We reach the end. The distraught maiden has slain her child, and now lies in prison upon her pallet of straw, awaiting death. *Faust* enters and tries to persuade her to fly with him. Her poor mind is all awry and occupies itself only with the scenes of her first meeting and the love-making in the garden. She turns with horror from her lover when she sees his companion, and in an agony of supplication, which rises higher and higher with each reiteration, she implores Heaven for pardon. She sinks lifeless to the floor. *Méphistophélès* pronounces her damned, but a voice from on high proclaims her saved. Celestial voices chant the Easter hymn, "Christ is risen!" while a band of angels bear her soul heavenward.

CHAPTER VII

"MEFISTOFELE"

THERE is no reason to question Gounod's statement that it was he who conceived the idea of writing a Faust opera in collaboration with MM. Barbier and Carré. There was nothing novel in the notion. Music was an integral part of the old puppet-plays which dealt with the legend of Dr. Faustus, and Goethe's tragedy calls for musical aid imperatively. A musical pantomime, "Harlequin Faustus," was performed in London as early as 1715, and there were Faust operas long before even the first part of Goethe's poem was printed, which was a hundred and one years ago. A composer named Phanty brought out an opera entitled "Dr. Faust's Zaubergürtel" in 1790; C. Hanke used the same material and title at Flushing in 1794, and Ignaz Walter produced a "Faust" in Hanover in 1797. Goethe's First Part had been five years in print when Spohr composed his "Faust," but it is based not on the great German poet's version of the legend, but on the old sources. This opera has still life, though it is fitful and feeble, in Germany, and was produced in London by a German company in 1840 and by an Italian in 1852, when the com-

poser conducted it; but I have never heard of a representation in America. Between Spohr's "Faust," written in 1813 and performed in 1818, and Boito's "Mefistofele," produced in 1868, many French, German, English, Italian, Russian, and Polish Faust operas have come into existence, lived their little lives, and died. Rietz produced a German "Faust," founded on Goethe, at Düsseldorf, in 1836; Lindpainter in Berlin, in 1854; Henry Rowley Bishop's English "Faustus" was heard in London, in 1827; French versions were Mlle. Angélique Bertin's "Faust" (Paris, 1831), and M. de Pellaert's (Brussels, 1834); Italian versions were "Fausta," by Donizetti (Mme. Pasta and Signor Donzelli sang in it in Naples in 1832), "Fausto," by Gordigiano (Florence. 1837), and "Il Fausto arrivo," by Raimondi (Naples, 1837); the Polish Faust, Twardowsky, is the hero of a Russian opera by Verstowsky (Moscow, 1831), and of a Polish opera by J. von Zaitz (Agram, 1880). How often the subject has served for operettas, cantatas, overtures, symphonies, etc., need not be discussed here. Berlioz's "Dramatic Legend," entitled "La Damnation de Faust," tricked out with stage pictures by Raoul Gunsbourg, was performed as an opera at Monte Carlo in 1903, and in New York at the Metropolitan and Manhattan opera-houses in the seasons 1906–1907 and 1907–1908, respectively; but the experiment was unsuccessful, both artistically and financially.

I have said that there is no reason to question Gounod's statement that it was he who conceived

the idea of writing the opera whose popularity is without parallel in the musical history of the Faust legend; but, if I could do so without reflecting upon his character, I should like to believe a story which says that it was Barbier who proposed the subject to Gounod after Meyerbeer, to whom he first suggested it, had declined the collaboration. I should like to believe this, because it is highly honorable to Meyerbeer's artistic character, which has been much maligned by critics and historians of music since Wagner set an example in that direction. "'Faust,'" Meyerbeer is reported to have replied to Barbier's invitation, "is the ark of the covenant, a sanctuary not to be approached with profane music." For the composer who did not hesitate to make an opera out of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, this answer is more than creditable. The Germans, who have either felt or affected great indignation at the want of reverence for their great poet shown by the authors of "Faust" and "Mignon," ought to admire Meyerbeer in a special degree for the moral loftiness of his determination and the dignified beauty of its expression. Composers like Kreutzer, Reissiger, Pierson, Lassen, and Prince Radziwill have written incidental music for Goethe's tragedy without reflecting that possibly they were profaning the sanctuary; but Meyerbeer, compared with whom they were pygmies, withheld his hand, and thereby brought himself into sympathetic association with the only musician that ever lived who was completely equipped for so magnifi-

cent a task. That musician was Beethoven, to whom Rochlitz bore a commission for music to "Faust" from Breitkopf and Härtel in 1822. The Titan read the proposition and cried out: "Ha! that would be a piece of work! Something might come of that!" but declined the task because he had the choral symphony and other large plans on his mind.

Boito is not a Beethoven nor yet a Meyerbeer; but, though he did what neither of them would venture upon when he wrote a Faust opera, he did it with complete and lovely reverence for the creation of the German poet. It is likely that had he had less reverence for his model and more of the stagecraft of his French predecessors, his opera would have had a quicker and greater success than fell to its lot. Of necessity it has suffered by comparison with the opera of Barbier, Carré, and Gounod, though it was far from Boito's intentions that it should ever be subjected to such a comparison. Boito is rather more poet and dramatist than he is musician. He made the book not only of "Mefistofele," but also of "Otello" and "Falstaff," which Verdi composed, "La Gioconda," for which Ponchielli wrote the music, and "Ero e Leandro," which he turned over to Bottesini, who set it with no success, and to Mancinelli, who set it with little. One of the musical pieces which the poet composed for this last opera found its way into "Mefistofele," for which work "Ero e Leandro" seems to have been abandoned. He also translated Wagner's "Tristan und

Isolde" into Italian. Being a poet in the first instance, and having the blood of the Northern barbarians as well as the Southern Romans in his veins, he was unwilling to treat Goethe's tragedy as the Frenchman had treated it. The tearful tale of the love of the rejuvenated philosopher, and the village maiden, with its woful outcome, did not suffice him. Though he called his opera "Mefistofele," not "Faust," he drew its scenes, of which only two have to do with *Marguerite* (or *Gretchen*), from both parts of Goethe's allegorical and philosophical phantasmagoria. Because he did this, he failed from one point of view. Attempting too much, he accomplished too little. His opera is not a well-knit and consistently developed drama, but a series of episodes, which do not hold together and have significance only for those who know Goethe's dramatic poem in its entirety. It is very likely that, as originally produced, "Mefistofele" was not such a thing of shreds and patches as it now is. No doubt, it held together better in 1868, when it was ridiculed, whistled, howled, and hissed off the stage of the Teatro la Scala, than it did when it won the admiration of the Italians in Bologna twelve years later. In the interval it had been subjected to a revision, and, the first version never having been printed, the critical fraternity became exceedingly voluble after the success in Bologna, one of the debated questions being whether Boito had bettered his work by his voluminous excisions, interpolations, and changes (*Faust*, now a tenor,

was originally a barytone), or had weakly surrendered his better judgment to the taste of the *hoi polloi*, for the sake of a popular success. It was pretty fighting ground; it is yet, and will remain such so long as the means of comparison remain hidden and sentimental hero-worship is fed by the notion that Boito has refused to permit the opera or operas which he has written since to be either published or performed because the world once refused to recognize his genius. This notion, equally convenient to an indolent man or a colossal egoist — I do not believe that Boito is either — has been nurtured by many pretty stories; but, unhappily, we have had nothing to help us to form an opinion of Boito as a creative artist since "Mefistofele" appeared, except the opera books written for Verdi and Ponchielli and the libretto of "Ero e Leandro."

Boito's father was an Italian, his mother a Pole. From either one or both he might have inherited the intensity of expression which marks his works, both poetical and musical; but the tendency to philosophical contemplation which characterizes "Mefistofele," even in the stunted form in which it is now presented, is surely the fruit of his maternal heritage and his studies in Germany. After completing the routine of the conservatory in Milan, he spent a great deal of time in Paris and the larger German cities, engrossed quite as much in the study of literature as of music. Had he followed his inclinations and the advice of Victor Hugo, who gave him a letter of introduction to Émile de Girardin,

he would have become a journalist in Paris instead of the composer of "Mefistofele" and the poet of "Otello," "Falstaff," "La Gioconda," and "Ero e Leandro." But Girardin was too much occupied with his own affairs to attend to him when Boito presented himself, and after waiting wearily, vainly, and long, he went to Poland, where, for want of something else to do, he sketched the opera "Mefistofele," which made its memorable fiasco at Milan in March, 1868.

To show that it is impossible to think of "Mefistofele" except as a series of disconnected episodes, it suffices to point out that its prologue, epilogue, and four acts embrace a fantastic parody or perversion of Goethe's Prologue in Heaven, a fragment of his Easter scene, a smaller fragment of the scene in *Faust's* study, a bit of the garden scene, the scene of the witches' gathering on the Brocken, the prison scene, the classical Sabbath in which *Faust* is discovered in an amour with *Helen of Troy*, and the death and salvation of *Faust* as an old man. Can any one who knows that music, even of the modern dramatic type, in which strictly musical forms have given way to as persistent an onward flow as the text itself, must of necessity act as a clog on dramatic action, imagine that such a number and variety of scenes could be combined into a logical, consistent whole, compassed by four hours in performance? Certainly not. But Boito is not content to emulate Goethe in his effort to carry his listeners "from heaven through the earth to hell";

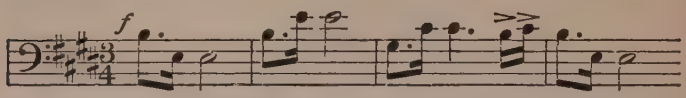
he must needs ask them to follow him in his exposition of Goethe's philosophy and symbolism. Of course, that is impossible during a stage representation, and therefore he exposes the workings of his mind in an essay and notes to his score. From these we may learn, among other things, that the poet-composer conceives Faust as the type of man athirst for knowledge, of whom Solomon was the Biblical prototype, Prometheus the mythological, Manfred and Don Quixote the predecessors in modern literature. Also that Mephistopheles is as inexhaustible as a type of evil as Faust is as a type of virtue, and therefore that this picturesque stage devil, with all his conventionality, is akin to the serpent which tempted Eve, the Thersites of Homer, and — *mirabile dictu!* — the Falstaff of Shakespeare!

The device with which Boito tried to link the scenes of his opera together is musical as well as philosophical. In the book which Barbier and Carré wrote for Gounod, *Faust* sells his soul to the devil for a period of sensual pleasure of indefinite duration, and, so far as the hero is concerned, the story is left unfinished. All that has been accomplished is the physical ruin of *Marguerite*. *Méphistophélès* exults for a moment in contemplation of the destruction, also, of the immortal part of her, but the angelic choir proclaims her salvation. *Faust* departs hurriedly with *Méphistophélès*, but whether to his death or in search of new adventures, we do not know. The Germans are, therefore,

not so wrong, after all, in calling the opera after the name of the heroine instead of that of the hero. In Boito's book the love story is but an incident. *Faust's* compact with *Mefistofele*, as in Goethe's dramatic poem, is the outcome of a wager between *Mefistofele* and God, under the terms of which the Spirit of Evil is to be permitted to seduce *Faust* from righteousness, if he can. *Faust's* demand of *Mefistofele* is rest from his unquiet, inquisitive mind; a solution of the dark problem of his own existence and that of the world; finally, one moment of which he can say, "Stay, for thou art lovely!" The amour with *Margherita* does not accomplish this, and so Boito follows Goethe into the conclusion of the second part of his drama, and shows *Faust*, at the end, an old man about to die. He recalls the loves of *Margherita* and *Helen*, but they were insufficient to give him the desired moment of happiness. He sees a vision of a people governed by him and made happy by wise laws of his creation. He goes into an ecstasy. *Mefistofele* summons sirens to tempt him, and spreads his cloak for another flight. But the chant of celestial beings falls into *Faust's* ear, and he speaks the words which terminate the compact. He dies. *Mefistofele* attempts to seize upon him, but is driven back by a shower of roses dropped by cherubim. The celestial choir chants redeeming love.

Thus much for the dramatic exposition. Boito's musical exposition rests on the employment of typical phrases, not in the manner of Wagner,

indeed, but with the fundamental purpose of Wagner. A theme:—



which begins the prologue, ends the epilogue. The reader may label it as he pleases. Its significance is obvious from the circumstances of its employment. It rings out *fortissimo* when the mystic chorus, which stands for the Divine Voice, puts the question, "Knowest thou *Faust?*" An angelic ascription of praise to the Creator of the Universe and to Divine Love is the first vocal utterance and the last. In his notes Boito observes: "Goethe was a great admirer of form, and his poem ends as it begins, — the first and last words of 'Faust' are uttered in Heaven." Then he quotes a remark from Blaze de Bury's essay on Goethe, which is apropos, though not strictly accurate: "The glorious motive which the immortal phalanxes sing in the introduction to the first part of 'Faust' recurs at the close, garbed with harmonies and mystical clouds. In this Goethe has acted like the musicians, — like Mozart, who recurs in the finale of 'Don Giovanni' to the imposing phrase of the overture."

M. de Bury refers, of course, to the supernatural music, which serves as an introduction to the overture to "Don Giovanni," and accompanies the visitation of the ghostly statue and the death of the libertine. But this is not the end of Mozart's

opera as he wrote it, as readers of this book have been told.

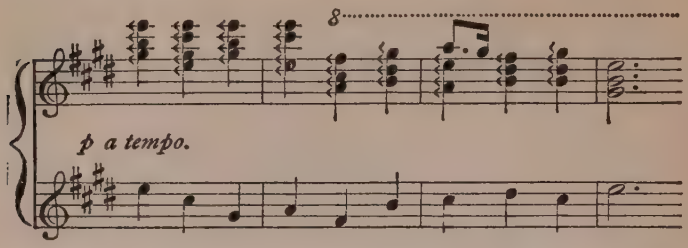
This prologue of "Mefistofele" plays in heaven. "In the heavens," says Theodore Marzials, the English translator of Boito's opera, out of deference to the religious sensibilities of the English people, to spare which he also changes "God" into "sprites," "spirits," "powers of good," and "angels." The effect is vastly diverting, especially when Boito's paraphrase of Goethe's

> Von Zeit zu Zeit seh' ich den Alten gern
> Und hüte mich mit ihm zu brechen.
> Es ist gar hübsch von einem grossen Herrn,
> So menschlich mit dem Teufel selbst zu sprechen.[1]

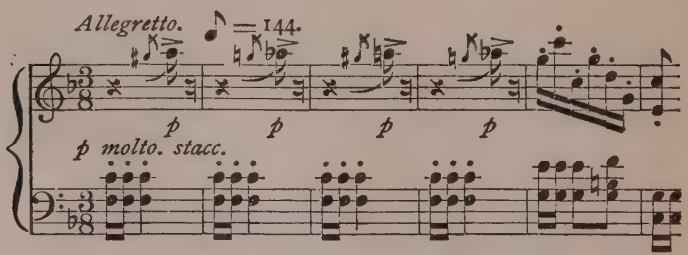
is turned into: "Now and again 'tis really pleasant thus to chat with the angels, and I'll take good care not to quarrel with them. 'Tis beautiful to hear Good and Evil speak together with such humanity." The picture disclosed by the opening of the curtain is a mass of clouds, with *Mefistofele*, like a dark blot, standing on a corner of his cloak in the shadow. The denizens of the celestial regions are heard but never seen. A trumpet sounds the fundamental theme, which is repeated in full

[1] I like, at times, to hear the Ancient's word,
And have a care to be most civil:
It's really kind of such a noble Lord
So humanly to gossip with the Devil.
—*Bayard Taylor's Translation.*

harmony after instruments of gentler voice have sung a hymn-like phrase, as follows: —



It is the first period of the "Salve Regina" sung by *Earthly Penitents* in the finale of the prologue. The canticle is chanted through, its periods separated by reiterations of the fundamental theme. A double chorus acclaims the Lord of Angels and Saints. A plan, evidently derived from the symphonic form, underlies the prologue as a whole. Prelude and chorus are rounded out by the significant trumpet phrase. One movement is completed. There follows a second movement, an Instrumental Scherzo, with a first section beginning thus: —



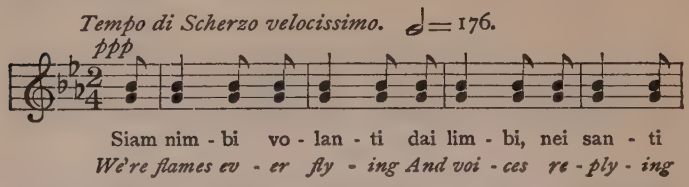
and a trio. Over this music *Mefistofele* carries on converse with God. He begs to disagree with

the sentiments of the angelic hymn. Wandering about the earth, he had observed man and found him in all things contemptible, especially in his vanity begotten by what he called "reason"; he, the miserable little cricket, vaingloriously jumping out of the grass in an effort to poke his nose among the stars, then falling back to chirp, had almost taken away from the devil all desire to tempt him to evil doings. "Knowest thou *Faust?*" asks the Divine Voice; and *Mefistofele* tells of the philosopher's insatiable thirst for wisdom. Then he offers the wager. The scene, though brief, follows Goethe as closely as Goethe follows the author of the Book of Job: —

> Now, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.
>
> And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it.
>
> And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?
>
> Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? . . .
>
> And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.

Boito treats the interview in what he calls a Dramatic Interlude, which gives way to the third movement, a Vocal Scherzo, starting off with a

chorus of *Cherubim,* who sing in fugacious thirds and droning dactyls: —



It is well to note particularly Boito's metrical device. He seemingly counted much on the effect of incessantly reiterated dactyls. Not only do his *Cherubim* adhere to the form without deviation, but *Helen* and *Pantalis* use it also in the scene imitated from Goethe's Classical Walpurgis Night, — use it for an especial purpose, as we shall see presently. Rapid syllabication is also a characteristic of the song of the witches in the scene on the Brocken; but the witches sing in octaves and fifths except when they kneel to do homage to *Mefistofele;* then their chant sounds like the responses to *John of Leyden's* prayer by the mutinous soldiers brought to their knees in "Le Prophète." Not at all ineptly, *Mefistofele,* who does not admire the *Cherubs,* likens their monotonous cantillation to the hum of bees. A fourth movement consists of a concluding psalmody, in which the *Cherubs* twitter, *Earthly Penitents* supplicate the Virgin, and the combined choirs, celestial and terrestrial, hymn the Creator.

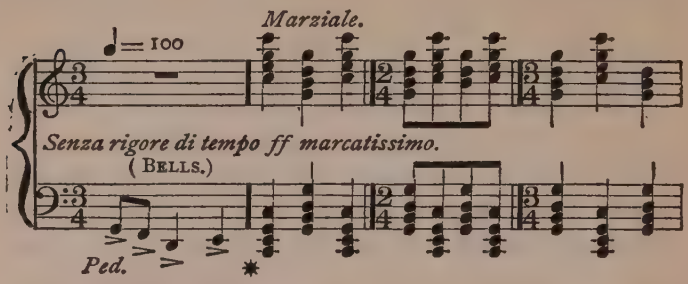
The tragedy now begins. Boito changes the order of the scenes which he borrows from Goethe, presenting first the merrymaking of the populace out-

side the walls of Frankfort-on-the-Main, and then the interview between *Faust* and *Mefistofele*, in which, as in the opening scene of Gounod's opera, the infernal compact is agreed upon. There is some mediæval pageantry in the first scene, — a cavalcade headed by the Elector, and including dignitaries, pages, falconers, the court fool, and ladies of the court. Students, townspeople, huntsmen, lads, and lasses pursue their pleasures, and up and down, through the motley groups, there wanders a gray friar, whose strange conduct repels some of the people, and whose pious garb attracts others. *Faust* and *Wagner*, his pupil, come upon the scene, conversing seriously, and stop to comment on the actions of the friar, who is approaching them, supposedly in narrowing circles. *Wagner* sees nothing in him except a mendicant friar, but *Faust* calls attention to the fact that to his eye, flames blaze up from his footprints. This friar is the "poodle" of Goethe's poem, and *Mefistofele* in disguise. It is thus that the devil presented himself to Faustus in the old versions of the legend, and as a friar he is a more practicable dramatic figure than he would have been as a dog; but it cannot but provoke a smile from those familiar with Goethe's poem to hear (as we do in the opera a few moments later) the familiar lines: —

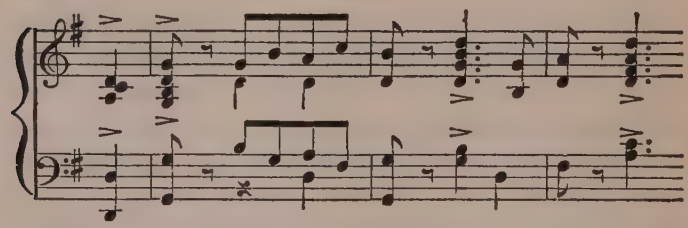
> Das also war des Pudels Kern!
> Ein fahrender Scolast?

turned into: "This, then, was the kernel of the friar! A cavalier?" The music of the score is

characterized by frequent changes from triple to double time, as illustrated in the opening measures:



The rhythmical energy and propulsiveness thus imparted to the music of the merrymaking is heightened by the dance. Peasants rush upon the scene with shouts of "Juhé!" and make preparations to trip it while singing what, at first, promises to be a waltz-song:—



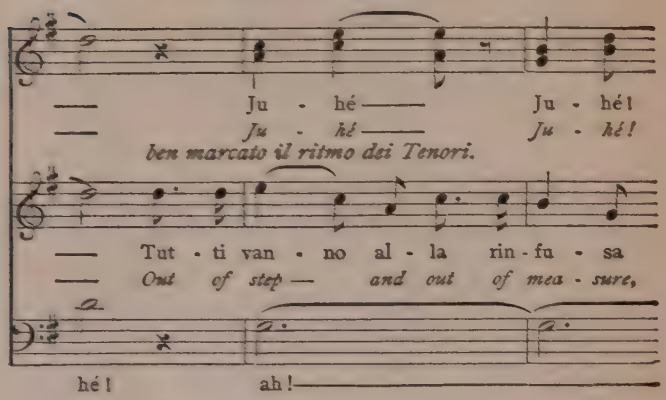
The dance, however, is not a waltz, but an obertass — the most popular of the rustic dances of Poland. Why should Boito have made his Rhinelanders dance a step which is characteristically that of the Poles? Sticklers for historical verity could easily convict him of a most unpardonable

anachronism, if they were so disposed, by pointing out that even if German peasants were in the habit of dancing the obertass now (which they are not), they could not have done it in the sixteenth century, which is the period of the drama, for the sufficient reason that the Polish dance was not introduced in North Germany till near the middle of the eighteenth century. But we need not inquire too curiously into details like this when it comes to so arbitrary an art-form as the opera. Yet Boito was his own poet, master of the situation so far as all parts of his work were concerned, and might have consulted historical accuracy in a department in which Gluck once found that he was the slave of his ballet master. Gluck refused to introduce a chaconne into "Iphigénie en Aulide." "A chaconne?" cried the composer. "When did the Greeks ever dance a chaconne?" "Didn't they?" replied Vestris; "then so much the worse for the Greeks!" A quarrel ensued, and Gluck, becoming incensed, withdrew his opera and would have left Paris had not Marie Antoinette come to the rescue. But Vestris got his chaconne. In all likelihood Boito put the obertass into "Mefistofele" because he knew that musically and as a spectacle the Polish dance would be particularly effective in the joyous hurly-burly of the scene. A secondary meaning of the Polish word is said to be "confusion," and Boito doubtless had this in mind when he made his peasants sing with an orderly disorder which is delightful:—

Tutti vanno alla rinfusa
Sulla musica confusa,

or, as one English translation has it:—

All is going to dire confusion
With the music in collusion.



Perhaps, too, Boito had inherited a love for the vigorous dance from his Polish mother.

Night falls, and *Faust* is returned to his laboratory. The gray friar has followed him (like Goethe's poodle) and slips into an alcove unobserved. The philosopher turns to the Bible, which lies upon a lectern, and falls into a meditation, which is interrupted by a shriek. He turns and sees the friar standing motionless and wordless before him. He conjures tne apparition with the seal of Solomon, and the friar, doffing cowl and gown, steps forward as a cavalier (an itinerant scholar in Goethe). He introduces himself as a part of the power that,

always thinking evil, as persistently accomplishes good — the spirit of negation. The speech ("Son Io Spirito che nega sempre") is one of the striking numbers of Boito's score, and the grim humor of its "No!" seems to have inspired the similar effect in *Falstaff's* discourse on honor in Verdi's opera. The pair quickly come to an understanding on the terms already set forth.

Act II carries us first into the garden of *Dame Martha*, where we find *Margherita* strolling arm in arm with *Faust*, and *Martha* with *Mefistofele*. The gossip is trying to seduce the devil into an avowal of love; *Margherita* and *Faust* are discussing their first meeting and the passion which they already feel for each other. Boito's *Margherita* has more of Goethe's *Gretchen* than Gounod's *Marguerite*. Like the former, she wonders what a cavalier can find to admire in her simple self, and protests in embarrassment when *Faust* (or *Enrico*, as he calls himself) kisses her rough hand. Like Goethe's maiden, too, she is concerned about the religious beliefs of her lover, and Boito's *Faust* answers, like Goethe's *Faust*, that a sincere man dares protest neither belief nor unbelief in God. Nature, Love, Mystery, Life, God — all are one, all to be experienced, not labelled with a name. Then he turns the talk on herself and her domestic surroundings, and presses the sleeping potion for her mother upon her. The scene ends with the four people scurrying about in a double chase among the flowers, for which Boito found exquisitely dainty music.

There is a change from the pretty garden of the first scene, with its idyllic music, to the gathering place of witches and warlocks, high up in the Brocken, in the second. We witness the vile orgies of the bestial crew into whose circles *Faust* is introduced, and see how *Mefistofele* is acclaimed king and receives the homage. Here Boito borrows a poetical conceit from Goethe's scene in the witches' kitchen, and makes it a vehicle for a further exposition of the character and philosophy of the devil. *Mefistofele* has seated himself upon a rocky throne and been vested with the robe and symbols of state by the witches. Now they bring to him a crystal globe, which he takes and discourses upon to the following effect (the translation is Theodore T. Barker's):—

Lo, here is the world!
  A bright sphere rising,
Setting, whirling, glancing,
Round the sun in circles dancing;
  Trembling, toiling,
  Yielding, spoiling,
Want and plenty by turn enfold it —
This world, behold it!
On its surface, by time abraded,
Dwelleth a vile race, defiled, degraded;
  Abject, haughty,
  Cunning, naughty,
Carrying war and desolation
From the top to the foundation
  Of creation.
For them Satan has no being;
  They scorn with laughter
  A hell hereafter,

And heavenly glory
As idle story.
Powers eternal! I'll join their laugh infernal
Thinking o'er their deeds diurnal. Ha! Ha!
Behold the world!

He dashes the globe to pieces on the ground and thereby sets the witches to dancing. To the antics of the vile crew *Faust* gives no heed; his eyes are fixed upon a vision of *Margherita*, her feet in fetters, her body emaciated, and a crimson line encircling her throat. His love has come under the headsman's axe! In the Ride to Hell, which concludes Berlioz's "Damnation de Faust," the infernal horsemen are greeted with shouts in a language which the mystical Swedenborg says is the speech of the lower regions. Boito also uses an infernal vocabulary. His witches screech "Saboé har Sabbah!" on the authority of Le Loyer's "Les Spectres."

From the bestiality of the Brocken we are plunged at the beginning of the third act into the pathos of *Margherita's* death. The episode follows the lines laid down by Barbier and Carré in their paraphrase of Goethe, except that for the sake of the beautiful music of the duet (which Boito borrowed from his unfinished "Ero e Leandro"), we learn that *Margherita* had drowned her child. *Faust* urges her to fly, but her poor mind is all awry. She recalls the scene of their first meeting and of the love-making in *Dame Martha's* garden, and the earlier music returns, as it does in Gounod's score, and

as it was bound to do. At the end she draws back in horror from *Faust*, after uttering a prayer above the music of the celestial choir, just as the executioner appears. *Mefistofele* pronounces her damned, but voices from on high proclaim her salvation.

The story of *Faust* and *Margherita* is ended, but, in pursuance of his larger plan, already outlined here, Boito makes use of two scenes from the second part of Goethe's drama to fill a fourth act and epilogue. They tell of the adventure of *Faust* with *Helen of Troy*, and of his death and the demon's defeat. The "Night of the Classical Sabbath" serves a dramatic purpose even less than the scene on the Brocken, but as an intermezzo it has many elements of beauty, and its scheme is profoundly poetical. Unfortunately we can only attain to a knowledge of the mission of the scene in the study with Goethe's poem in hand and commentaries and Boito's prefatory notes within reach. The picture is full of serene loveliness. We are on the shore of Peneus, in the Vale of Tempe. The moon at its zenith sheds its light over the thicket of laurel and oleanders, and floods a Doric temple on the left. *Helen of Troy* and *Pantalis*, surrounded by a group of sirens, praise the beauty of nature in an exquisite duet, which flows on as placidly as the burnished stream. *Faust* lies sleeping upon a flowery bank, and in his dreams calls upon *Helen* in the intervals of her song. *Helen* and *Pantalis* depart, and *Faust* is ushered in by *Mefistofele*. He is clad in his

proper mediæval garb, in strong contrast to the classic robes of the denizens of the valley in Thessaly. *Mefistofele* suggests to *Faust* that they now separate; the land of antique fable has no charm for him. *Faust* is breathing in the idiom of *Helen's* song like a delicate perfume which inspires him with love; *Mefistofele* longs for the strong, resinous odors of the Harz Mountains, where dominion over the Northern hags belongs to him. *Faust* is already gone, and he is about to depart when there approaches a band of *Choretids*. With gentle grace they move through a Grecian dance, and *Mefistofele* retires in disgust. *Helen* returns profoundly disquieted by a vision of the destruction of Troy, of which she was the cause. The *Choretids* seek to calm her in vain, but the tortures of conscience cease when she sees *Faust* before her. He kneels and praises her beauty, and she confesses herself enamoured of his speech, in which sound answers sound like a soft echo. "What," she asks, "must I do to learn so sweet and gentle an idiom?" "Love me, as I love you," replies *Faust*, in effect, as they disappear through the bowers. Now let us turn to Goethe, his commentators, and Boito's explanatory notes to learn the deeper significance of the episode, which, with all its gracious charm, must still appear dramatically impertinent and disturbing. Rhyme was unknown to the Greeks, the music of whose verse came from syllabic quantity. *Helen* and her companions sing in classic strain, as witness the opening duet:—

La luna immobile innonda l' etere d'un raggio pallido.
Callido balsamo stillan le ramora dai cespi roridi;
Doridi e silfidi, cigni e nereidi vagan sul l' alighi.

Faust addresses *Helen* in rhyme, the discovery of the Romantic poets: —

Forma ideal purissima
Della bellezza eterna!
Un uom ti si prosterna
  Innamorato al suolo
Volgi ver me la cruna
Di tua pupilla bruna,
Vaga come la luna,
  Ardente come il sole.

"Here," says Boito, "is a myth both beautiful and deep. *Helen* and *Faust* represent Classic and Romantic art gloriously wedded, Greek beauty and Germanic beauty gleaming under the same aureole, glorified in one embrace, and generating an ideal poesy, eclectic, new, and powerful."

The contents of the last act, which shows us *Faust's* death and salvation, have been set forth in the explanation of Boito's philosophical purpose. An expository note may, however, profitably be added in the poet-composer's own words: "Goethe places around *Faust* at the beginning of the scene four ghostly figures, who utter strange and obscure words. What Goethe has placed on the stage we place in the orchestra, submitting sounds instead of words, in order to render more incorporeal and impalpable the hallucinations that trouble *Faust*

on the brink of death." The ghostly figures referred to by Boito are the four "Gray Women" of Goethe — *Want*, *Guilt*, *Care*, and *Necessity*. Boito thinks like a symphonist, and his purpose is profoundly poetical, but its appreciation asks more than the ordinary opera-goer is willing or able to give.[1]

[1] "Mefistofele" had its first performance in New York at the Academy of Music on November 24, 1880. Mlle. Valleria was the *Margherita* and *Elena*, Miss Annie Louise Cary the *Marta* and *Pantalis*, Signor Campanini *Faust*, and Signor Novara *Mefistofele*. Signor Arditi conducted. The first representation of the opera at the Metropolitan Opera-house took place on December 5, 1883, when, with one exception, the cast was the same as at the first performance in London, at Her Majesty's Theatre, on July 6, 1880 — namely, Nilsson as *Margherita* and *Elena*, Trebelli as *Marta* and *Pantalis*, Campanini as *Faust* and Mirabella as *Mefistofele*. (In London Nannetti enacted the demon.) Cleofonte Campanini, then *maestro di cembalo* at the Metropolitan Opera-house, conducted the performance.

CHAPTER VIII

"LA DAMNATION DE FAUST"

In an operatic form Berlioz's "Damnation de Faust" had its first representation in New York at the Metropolitan Opera-house on December 7, 1906. Despite its high imagination, its melodic charm, its vivid and varied colors, its frequent flights toward ideal realms, its accents of passion, its splendid picturesqueness, it presented itself as a "thing of shreds and patches." It was, indeed, conceived as such, and though Berlioz tried by various devices to give it entity, he failed. When he gave it to the world, he called it a "Dramatic Legend," a term which may mean much or little as one chooses to consider it; but I can recall no word of his which indicates that he ever thought that it was fit for the stage. It was Raoul Gunsbourg, director of the opera at Monte Carlo, who, in 1903, conceived the notion of a theatrical representation of the legend and tricked it out with pictures and a few attempts at action. Most of these attempts are futile and work injury to the music, as will presently appear, but in a few instances they were successful, indeed very successful. Of course, if Berlioz had wanted to make an opera out of Goethe's

drama, he could have done so. He would then have anticipated Gounod and Boito and, possibly, have achieved one of those popular successes for which he hungered. But he was in his soul a poet, in his heart a symphonist, and intellectually (as many futile efforts proved) incapable of producing a piece for the boards. When the Faust subject first seized upon his imagination, he knew it only in a prose translation of Goethe's poem made by Gerald de Nerval. In his "Memoirs" he tells us how it fascinated him. He carried it about with him, reading it incessantly and eagerly at dinner, in the streets, in the theatre. In the prose translation there were a few fragments of songs. These he set to music and published under the title "Huit Scènes de Faust," at his own expense. Marx, the Berlin critic, saw the music and wrote the composer a letter full of encouragement. But Berlioz soon saw grave defects in his work and withdrew it from circulation, destroying all the copies which he could lay hands on. What was good in it, however, he laid away for future use. The opportunity came twenty years later, when he was fired anew with a desire to write music for Goethe's poem.

Though he had planned the work before starting out on his memorable artistic travels, he seems to have found inspiration in the circumstance that he was amongst a people who were more appreciative of his genius than his own countrymen, and whose language was that employed by the poet. Not more than one-sixth of his "Eight Scenes" had con-

sisted of settings of the translations of M. de Nerval. A few scenes had been prepared by M. Gaudonnière from notes provided by the composer. The rest of the book Berlioz wrote himself, now paraphrasing the original poet, now going to him only for a suggestion. As was the case with Wagner, words and music frequently presented themselves to him simultaneously. Travelling from town to town, conducting rehearsals and concerts, he wrote whenever and wherever he could — one number in an inn at Passau, the Elbe scene and the Dance of the Sylphs at Vienna, the peasants' song by gaslight in a shop one night when he had lost his way in Pesth, the angels' chorus in *Marguerite's* apotheosis at Prague (getting up in the middle of the night to write it down), the song of the students, "Jam nox stellata velamina pandit" (of which the words are also Berlioz's), at Breslau. He finished the work in Rouen and Paris, at home, at his café, in the gardens of the Tuilleries, even on a stone in the Boulevard du Temple. While in Vienna he made an orchestral transcription of the famous Rakoczy march (in one night, he says, though this is scarcely credible, since the time would hardly suffice to write down the notes alone). The march made an extraordinary stir at the concert in Pesth when he produced it, and this led him to incorporate it, with an introduction, into his Legend — a proceeding which he justified as a piece of poetical license; he thought that he was entitled to put his hero in any part of the world and in any situation that he pleased.

This incident serves to indicate how lightly all dramatic fetters sat upon Berlioz while "La Damnation" was in his mind, and how little it occurred to him that any one would ever make the attempt to place his scenes upon the stage. In the case of the Hungarian march, this has been done only at the sacrifice of Berlioz's poetical conceit to which the introductory text and music were fitted; but of this more presently. As Berlioz constructed the "Dramatic Legend," it belonged to no musical category. It was neither a symphony with vocal parts like his "Roméo et Juliette" (which has symphonic elements in some of its sections), nor a cantata, nor an oratorio. It is possible that this fact was long an obstacle to its production. Even in New York where, on its introduction, it created the profoundest sensation ever witnessed in a local concert-room, it was performed fourteen times with the choral parts sung by the Oratorio Society before that organization admitted it into its lists.

And now to tell how the work was fitted to the uses of the lyric theatre. Nothing can be plainer to persons familiar with the work in its original form than that no amount of ingenuity can ever give the scenes of the "Dramatic Legend" continuity or coherency. Boito, in his opera, was unwilling to content himself with the episode of the amour between *Faust* and *Marguerite;* he wanted to bring out the fundamental ethical idea of the poet, and he went so far as to attempt the Prologue in Heaven, the Classical Sabbath, and the death of *Faust* with the

contest for his soul. Berlioz had no scruples of any kind. He chose his scenes from Goethe's poem, changed them at will, and interpolated an incident simply to account for the Hungarian march. Connection with each other the scenes have not, and some of the best music belongs wholly in the realm of the ideal. At the outset Berlioz conceived *Faust* alone on a vast field in Hungary in spring. He comments on the beauties of nature and praises the benison of solitude. His ruminations are interrupted by a dance of peasants and the passage of an army to the music of the Rakoczy march. This scene M. Gunsbourg changes to a picture of a mediæval interior in which *Faust* soliloquizes, and a view through the window of a castle with a sally-port. Under the windows the peasants dance, and out of the huge gateway come the soldiery and march off to battle. At the climax of the music which drove the people of Pesth wild at its first performance, so that Berlioz confessed that he himself shuddered and felt the hair bristling on his head — when in a long *crescendo* fugued fragments of the march theme keep reappearing, interrupted by drum-beats like distant cannonading, Gunsbourg's battalions halt, and there is a solemn benediction of the standards. Then, to the peroration, the soldiers run, not as if eager to get into battle, but as if in inglorious retreat.

The second scene reproduces the corresponding incident in Gounod's opera — *Faust* in his study, life-weary and despondent. He is about to drink

a cup of poison when the rear wall of the study rolls up and discloses the interior of a church with a kneeling congregation which chants the Easter canticle, "Christ is risen!" Here is one of the fine choral numbers of the work for which concert, not operatic, conditions are essential. The next scene, however, is of the opera operatic, and from that point of view the most perfect in the work. It discloses the revel of students, citizens, and soldiers in Auerbach's cellar. *Brander* sings the song of the rat which by good living had developed a paunch "like Dr. Luther's," but died of poison laid by the cook. The drinkers shout a boisterous refrain after each stanza, and supplement the last with a mock-solemn "Requiescat in pace, Amen." The phrase suggests new merriment to *Brander*, who calls for a fugue on the "Amen," and the roisterers improvise one on the theme of the rat song, which calls out hearty commendation from *Méphistophélès*, and a reward in the shape of the song of the flea — a delightful piece of grotesquerie with its accompaniment suggestive of the skipping of the pestiferous little insect which is the subject of the song.

The next scene is the triumph of M. Gunsbourg, though for it he is indebted to Miss Loie Fuller and the inventor of the aërial ballet. In the conceit of Berlioz, *Faust* lies asleep on the bushy banks of the Elbe. *Méphistophélès* summons gnomes and sylphs to fill his mind with lovely fancies. They do their work so well as to entrance, not only *Faust*, but all who hear their strains. The instrumental ballet is

a fairy waltz, a filmy musical fabric, seemingly woven of moonbeams and dewy cobwebs, over a pedal-point on the muted violoncellos, ending with drum taps and harmonics from the harp — one of the daintiest and most original orchestral effects imaginable. So dainty is the device, indeed, that one would think that nothing could come between it and the ears of the transported listeners without ruining the ethereal creation. But M. Gunsbourg's fancy has accomplished the miraculous. Out of the river bank he constructs a floral bower rich as the magical garden of *Klingsor*. Sylphs circle around the sleeper and throw themselves into graceful attitudes while the song is sounding. Then to the music of the elfin waltz, others enter who have, seemingly, cast off the gross weight which holds mortals in contact with the earth. With robes a-flutter like wings, they dart upwards and remain suspended in mid-air at will or float in and out of the transporting picture. To *Faust* is also presented a vision of *Marguerite*.

The next five scenes in Berlioz's score are connected by M. Gunsbourg and forced to act in sequence for the sake of the stage set, in which a picture of *Marguerite's* chamber is presented in the conventional fashion made necessary by the exigency of showing an exterior and interior at the same time, as in the last act of "Rigoletto." For a reason at which I cannot even guess, M. Gunsbourg goes farther and transforms the chamber of *Marguerite* into a sort of semi-enclosed arbor, and places a

lantern in her hand instead of the lamp, so that she may enter in safety from the street. In this street there walk soldiers, followed by students, singing their songs. Through them *Faust* finds his way and into the trellised enclosure. The strains of the songs are heard at the last blended in a single harmony. *Marguerite* enters through the street with her lantern and sings the romance of the King of Thule, which Berlioz calls a *Chanson Gothique*, one of the most original of his creations and, like the song in the next scene, "L'amour l'ardente flamme," which takes the place of Goethe's "Meine Ruh' ist hin," is steeped in a mood of mystical tenderness quite beyond description. *Méphistophélès* summons will-o'-the-wisps to aid in the bewilderment of the troubled mind of *Marguerite*. Here realism sadly disturbs the scene as Berlioz asks that the fancy shall create it. The customary dancing lights of the stage are supplemented with electrical effects which are beautiful, if not new. They do not mar if they do not help the grotesque minuet. But when M. Gunsbourg materializes the ghostly flames and presents them as a mob of hopping figures, he throws douches of cold water on the imagination of the listeners. Later he spoils enjoyment of the music utterly by making it the accompaniment of some utterly irrelevant pantomime by *Marguerite*, who goes into the street and is seen writhing between the conflicting emotions of love and duty, symbolized by a vision of *Faust* and the glowing of a cross on the façade of a church. To learn the meaning of this, one must go to the

libretto, where he may read that it is all a dream dreamed by *Marguerite* after she had fallen asleep in her arm-chair. But we see her awake, not asleep, and it is all foolish and disturbing stuff put in to fill time and connect two of Berlioz's scenes. *Marguerite* returns to the room which she had left only in her dream, *Faust* discovers himself, and there follows the inevitable love-duet which *Méphistophélès* changes into a trio when he enters to urge *Faust* to depart. Meanwhile, *Marguerite's* neighbors gather in the street and warn *Dame Martha* of the misdeeds of *Marguerite*. The next scene seems to have been devised only to give an environment to Berlioz's paraphrase of Goethe's immortal song at the spinning-wheel. From the distance is heard the fading song of the students and the last echo of drums and trumpets sounding the retreat. *Marguerite* rushes to the window, and, overcome, rather unaccountably, with remorse and grief, falls in a swoon.

The last scene. A mountain gorge, a rock in the foreground surmounted by a cross. *Faust's* soliloquy, "Nature, immense, impénétrable et fière," was inspired by Goethe's exalted invocation to nature. *Faust* signs the compact, *Méphistophélès* summons the infernal steeds, *Vortex* and *Giaour*, and the ride to hell begins. Women and children at the foot of the cross supplicate the prayers of Mary, Magdalen, and Margaret. The cross disappears in a fearful crash of sound, the supplicants flee, and a moving panorama shows the visions which are supposed to meet the gaze of the riders — birds of night, dan-

gling skeletons, a hideous and bestial phantasmagoria at the end of which *Faust* is delivered to the flames. The picture changes, and above the roofs of the sleeping town appears a vision of angels welcoming *Marguerite.*

CHAPTER IX

"LA TRAVIATA"

In music the saying that "familiarity breeds contempt," is true only of compositions of a low order. In the case of compositions of the highest order, familiarity generally breeds ever growing admiration. In this category new compositions are slowly received; they make their way to popular appreciation only by repeated performances. It is true that the people like best the songs as well as the symphonies which they know best; but even this rule has its exceptions. It is possible to grow indifferent to even high excellence because of constant association with it. Especially is this true when the form — that is, the manner of expression — has grown antiquated; then, not expecting to find the kind of quality to which our tastes are inclined, we do not look for it, and though it may be present, it frequently passes unnoticed. The meritorious old is, therefore, just as much subject to non-appreciation as the meritorious new. Let me cite an instance.

Once upon a time duty called me to the two opera-houses of New York on the same evening. At the first I listened to some of the hot-blooded music

of an Italian composer of the so-called school of *verismo*. Thence I went to the second. Verdi's "Traviata" was performing. I entered the room just as the orchestra began the prelude to the last act. As one can see without observing, so one can hear without listening — a wise provision which nature has made for the critic, and a kind one; I had heard that music so often during a generation of time devoted to musical journalism that I had long since quit listening to it. But now my jaded faculties were arrested by a new quality in the prelude. I had always admired the composer of "Rigoletto," "Il Trovatore," and "Traviata," and I loved and revered the author of "Aïda," "Otello," and "Falstaff." I had toddled along breathlessly in the trail made by his seven-league boots during the last thirty-five years of his career; but as I listened I found myself wondering that I had not noticed before that his modernity had begun before I had commenced to realize even what maternity meant — more than half a century ago, for "La Traviata" was composed in 1853. The quivering atmosphere of *Violetta's* sick-room seemed almost visible as the pathetic bit of hymnlike music rose upward from the divided viols of the orchestra like a cloud of incense which gathered itself together and floated along with the pathetic song of the solo violin. The work of palliating the character of the courtesan had begun, and on it went with each recurrence of the sad, sweet phrase as it punctuated the conversation between *Violetta* and her maid, until memory of her

moral grossness was swallowed up in pity for her suffering. Conventional song-forms returned when poet and composer gave voice to the dying woman's lament for the happiness that was past and her agony of fear when she felt the touch of Death's icy hand; but where is melody more truthfully eloquent than in "Addio, del passato," and "Gran Dio! morir so giovane"? Is it within the power of instruments, no matter how great their number, or harmony with all the poignancy which it has acquired through the ingenious use of dissonance, or of broken phrase floating on an instrumental flood, to be more dramatically expressive than are these songs? Yet they are, in a way, uncompromisingly formal, architectural, strophic, and conventionally Verdian in their repetition of rhythmical motives and their melodic formularies. This introduction to the third act recalls the introduction to the first, which also begins with the hymnlike phrase, and sets the key-note of pathos which is sounded at every dramatic climax, though pages of hurdy-gurdy tune and unmeaning music intervene. Recall "Ah, fors' è lui che l' anima," with its passionate second section, "A quell' amor," and that most moving song of resignation, "Dite all' giovine." These things outweigh a thousand times the glittering tinsel of the opera and give "Traviata" a merited place, not only beside the later creations of the composer, but among those latter-day works which we call lyric dramas to distinguish them from those which we still call operas, with commiserating emphasis on the word.

That evening I realized the appositeness of Dr. von Bülow's remark to Mascagni when the world seemed inclined to hail that young man as the continuator of Verdi's operatic evangel: "I have found your successor in your predecessor, Verdi," but it did not seem necessary to think of "Otello" and "Falstaff" in connection with the utterance; "La Traviata" alone justifies it. Also it was made plain what Verdi meant, when after the first performance of his opera, and its monumental fiasco, he reproached his singers with want of understanding of his music. The story of that fiasco and the origin of the opera deserve a place here. "La Traviata," as all the world knows, is based upon the book and drama, "La Dame aux Camélias," by the younger Dumas, known to Americans and Englishmen as "Camille." The original book appeared in 1848, the play in 1852. Verdi witnessed a performance of the play when it was new. He was writing "Il Trovatore" at the time, but the drama took so strong a hold upon him that he made up his mind at once to turn it into an opera. As was his custom, he drafted a plan of the work, and this he sent to Piave, who for a long time had been his librettist in ordinary. Francesco Maria Piave was little more than a hack-writer of verse, but he knew how to put Verdi's ideas into practicable shape, and he deserves to be remembered with kindly interest as the great composer's collaborator in the creation of "I due Foscari," "Ernani," "Macbetto," "Il Corsaro," "Stiffelio," "Simon Boc-

canegra," "Aroldo" (a version of "Stiffelio"), and "La Forza del Destino." His artistic relations with Verdi lasted from 1844 to 1862, but the friendship of the men endured till the distressful end of Piave's life, which came in 1876. He was born three years earlier than Verdi (in 1810), in Durano, of which town his father had been the last podesta under the Venetian republic. He went mad some years before he died, and thenceforward lived off Verdi's bounty, the warm-hearted composer not only giving him a pension, but also caring for his daughter after his death. In 1853 Verdi's creative genius was at flood-tide. Four months was the time which he usually devoted to the composition of an opera, but he wrote "La Traviata" within four weeks, and much of the music was composed concurrently with that of "Il Trovatore." This is proved by the autograph, owned by his publishers, the Ricordis, and there is evidence of the association in fraternity of phrase in some of the uninteresting pages of the score. (See "Morrò! la mia memoria" for instance, and the dance measures with their trills.) "Il Trovatore" was produced at Rome on January 19, 1853, and "La Traviata" on March 6 of the same year at the Fenice Theatre in Venice. "Il Trovatore" was stupendously successful; "La Traviata" made a woful failure. Verdi seems to have been fully cognizant of the causes which worked together to produce the fiasco, though he was disinclined at the time to discuss them. Immediately after the first representation he wrote to Muzio:

"'La Traviata' last night a failure. Was the fault mine or the singers'? Time will tell." To Vincenzo Luccardi, sculptor, professor at the Academy of San Luca in Rome, one of his most intimate friends, he wrote after the second performance: "The success was a fiasco — a complete fiasco! I do not know whose fault it was; it is best not to talk about it. I shall tell you nothing about the music, and permit me to say nothing about the performers." Plainly, he did not hold the singers guiltless. Varesi, the barytone, who was intrusted with the part of the elder *Germont*, had been disaffected, because he thought it beneath his dignity. Nevertheless, he went to the composer and offered his condolences at the fiasco. Verdi wanted none of his sympathy. "Condole with yourself and your companions who have not understood my music," was his somewhat ungracious rejoinder. No doubt the singers felt some embarrassment in the presence of music which to them seemed new and strange in a degree which we cannot appreciate now. Abramo Basevi, an Italian critic, who wrote a book of studies on Verdi's operas, following the fashion set by Lenz in his book on Beethoven, divides the operas which he had written up to the critic's time into examples of three styles, the early operas marking his first manner and "Luisa Miller" the beginning of his second. In "La Traviata" he says Verdi discovered a third manner, resembling in some things the style of French *opéra comique*. "This style of music," he says, "although it has not been

tried on the stage in Italy, is, however, not unknown in private circles. In these latter years we have seen Luigi Gordigiani and Fabio Campana making themselves known principally in this style of music, called *da camera*. Verdi, with his 'Traviata,' has transported this chamber-music on to the stage, to which the subject he has chosen still lends itself, and with happy success. We meet with more simplicity in this work than in the others of the same composer, especially as regards the orchestra, where the quartet of stringed instruments is almost always predominant; the *parlanti* occupy a great part of the score; we meet with several of those airs which repeat under the form of verses; and, finally, the principal vocal subjects are for the most part developed in short binary and ternary movements, and have not, in general, the extension which the Italian style demands." Campana and Gordigiani were prolific composers of romanzas and canzonettas of a popular type. Their works are drawing-room music, very innocuous, very sentimental, very insignificant, and very far from the conception of chamber-music generally prevalent now. How they could have been thought to have influenced so virile a composer as Verdi, it is difficult to see. But musical critics enjoy a wide latitude of observation. In all likelihood there was nothing more in Dr. Basevi's mind than the strophic structure of "Di Provenza," the song style of some of the other arias to which attention has been called and the circumstance that these, the most striking numbers in the score,

mark the points of deepest feeling. In this respect, indeed, there is some relationship between "La Traviata" and "Der Freischütz" — though this is an observation which will probably appear as far-fetched to some of my critics as Dr. Basevi's does to me.

There were other reasons of a more obvious and external nature for the failure of "La Traviata" on its first production. Lodovico Graziani, the tenor, who filled the rôle of *Alfredo*, was hoarse, and could not do justice to the music; Signora Salvini-Donatelli, the *Violetta* of the occasion, was afflicted with an amplitude of person which destroyed the illusion of the death scene and turned its pathos into absurdity. The spectacle of a lady of mature years and more than generous integumental upholstery dying of consumption was more than the Venetian sense of humor could endure with equanimity. The opera ended with shrieks of laughter instead of the lachrymal flood which the music and the dramatic situation called for. This spirit of irreverence had been promoted, moreover, by the fact that the people of the play wore conventional modern clothes. The lure of realism was not strong in the lyric theatres half a century ago, when laces and frills, top-boots and plumed hats, helped to confine the fancy to the realm of idealism in which it was believed opera ought to move. The first result of the fiasco was a revision of the costumes and stage furniture, by which simple expedient Mr. Dumas's *Marguerite Gauthier* was

changed from a courtesan of the time of Louis Philippe to one of the period of Louis XIV. It is an amusing illustration of how the whirligig of time brings its revenges that the spirit of *verismo*, masquerading as a desire for historical accuracy, has restored the period of the Dumas book, — that is, restored it in name, but not in fact, — with the result, in New York and London at least, of making the dress of the opera more absurd than ever. *Violetta*, exercising the right which was conquered by the prima donna generations ago, appears always garbed in the very latest style, whether she be wearing one of her two ball dresses or her simple afternoon gown. For aught that I know, the latest fad in woman's dress may also be hidden in the dainty folds of the *robe de chambre* in which she dies. The elder *Germont* has for two years appeared before the New York public as a well-to-do country gentleman of Provence might have appeared sixty years ago, but his son has thrown all sartorial scruples to the wind, and wears the white waistcoat and swallowtail of to-day.

The Venetians were allowed a year to get over the effects of the first representations of "La Traviata," and then the opera was brought forward again with the new costumes. Now it succeeded and set out upon the conquest of the world. It reached London on May 24, St. Petersburg on November 1, New York on December 3, and Paris on December 6 — all in the same year, 1856. The first *Violetta* in New York was Mme. Anna La Grange,

the first *Alfredo* Signor Brignoli, and the first *Germont père* Signor Amodio. There had been a destructive competition between Max Maretzek's Italian company at the Academy of Music and a German company at Niblo's Garden. The regular Italian season had come to an end with a quarrel between Maretzek and the directors of the Academy. The troupe prepared to embark for Havana, but before doing so gave a brief season under the style of the La Grange Opera Company, and brought forward the new opera on December 3, three days before the Parisians were privileged to hear it. The musical critic of the *Tribune* at the time was Mr. W. H. Fry, who was not only a writer on political and musical subjects, but a composer, who wrote an opera, "Leonora," in which Mme. La Grange sang at the Academy about a year and a half later. His review of the first performance of "La Traviata," which appeared in the *Tribune* of December 5, 1856, is worth reading for more reasons than one:—

The plot of "La Traviata" we have already given to our readers. It is simply "Camille." The first scene affords us some waltzing music, appropriate in its place, on which a (musical) dialogue takes place. The waltz is not specially good, nor is there any masterly outworking of detail. A fair drinking song is afforded, which pleased, but was not encored. A pretty duet by Mme. de la Grange and Signor Brignoli may be noticed also in this act; and the final air, by Madame de la Grange, "Ah! fors' e lui che l' anima," contained a brilliant, florid close which brought down the house, and the curtain had to be reraised to admit of a repetition. Act II admits of

more intensified music than Act I. A brief air by *Alfred* (Brignoli) is followed by an air by *Germont* (Amodio), and by a duet, *Violetta* (La Grange) and *Germont*. The duet is well worked up and is rousing, passionate music. Verdi's mastery of dramatic accent — of the modern school of declamation — is here evident. Some dramatic work, the orchestra leading, follows — bringing an air by *Germont*, "Di Provenza il mar." This is a 2–4 travesty of a waltz known as Weber's Last Waltz (which, however, Weber never wrote); and is too uniform in the length of its notes to have dramatic breadth or eloquence. A good hit is the sudden exit of *Alfred* thereupon, not stopping to make an andiamo duet as is so often done. The next scene introduces us to a masquerade where are choruses of quasi-gypsies, matadors, and picadors, — sufficiently characteristic. The scene after the card-playing, which is so fine in the play, is inefficient in music. Act III in the book (though it was made Act IV on this occasion by subdividing the second) reveals the sick-room of *Traviata*. A sweet air, minor and major by turns, with some hautboy wailing, paints the sufferer's sorrows. A duet by the lovers, "Parigi, O cara," is especially original in its peroration. The closing trio has due culmination and anguish, though we would have preferred a quiet ending to a hectic shriek and a doubly loud force in the orchestra.

Goldsmith's rule in "The Vicar" for criticising a painting was always to say that "the picture would have been better if the painter had taken more pains." Perhaps the same might be said about "La Traviata"; but whether it would have pleased the public more is another question. Some of the airs certainly would bear substitution by others in the author's happier vein. The opera was well received. Three times the singers were called before the curtain. The piece was well put on the stage. Madame La Grange never looked so well. Her toilet was charming.

The principal incidents of Dumas's play are reproduced with general fidelity in the opera. In the first act there are scenes of gayety in the house of *Violetta*—dancing, feasting, and love-making. Among the devotees of the courtesan is *Alfredo Germont*, a young man of respectable Provençal family. He joins in the merriment, singing a drinking song with *Violetta*, but his devotion to her is unlike that of his companions. He loves her sincerely, passionately, and his protestations awaken in her sensations never felt before. For a moment, she indulges in a day-dream of honest affection, but banishes it with the reflection that the only life for which she is fitted is one devoted to the pleasures of the moment, the mad revels rounding out each day, and asking no care of the moment. But at the last the voice of *Alfredo* floats in at the window, burdening the air and her heart with an echo of the longing to which she had given expression in her brief moment of thoughtfulness. She yields to *Alfredo's* solicitations and a strangely new emotion, and abandons her dissolute life to live with him alone.

In the second act the pair are found housed in a country villa not far from Paris. From the maid *Alfredo* learns that *Violetta* has sold her property in the city — house, horses, carriages, and all — in order to meet the expenses of the rural establishment. Conscience-smitten, he hurries to Paris to prevent the sacrifice, but in his absence *Violetta* is called upon to make a much greater. *Giorgio Ger-*

mont, the father of her lover, visits her, and, by appealing to her love for his son and picturing the ruin which is threatening him and the barrier which his illicit association with her is placing in the way of the happy marriage of his sister, persuades her to give him up. She abandons home and lover, and returns to her old life in the gay city, making a favored companion of the *Baron Duphol.* In Paris, at a masked ball in the house of *Flora*, one of her associates, *Alfredo* finds her again, overwhelms her with reproaches, and ends a scene of excitement by denouncing her publicly and throwing his gambling gains at her feet.

Baron Duphol challenges *Alfredo* to fight a duel. The baron is wounded. The elder *Germont* sends intelligence of *Alfredo's* safety to *Violetta*, and informs her that he has told his son of the great sacrifice which she had made for love of him. *Violetta* dies in the arms of her lover, who had hurried to her on learning the truth, only to find her suffering the last agonies of disease.

In the preface to his novel, Dumas says that the principal incidents of the story are true. It has also been said that Dickens was familiar with them, and at one time purposed to make a novel on the subject; but this statement scarcely seems credible. Such a novel would have been un-English in spirit and not at all in harmony with the ideals of the author of "David Copperfield" and "Dombey and Son." Play and opera at the time of their first production raised questions of taste and morals

which have remained open ever since. Whether the anathema periodically pronounced against them by private and official censorship helps or hinders the growth of such works in popularity, there is no need of discussing here. There can scarcely be a doubt, however, but that many theatrical managers of to-day would hail with pleasure and expectation of profit such a controversy over one of their new productions as greeted "La Traviata" in London. The Lord Chamberlain had refused to sanction the English adaptations of "La Dame aux Camélias," and when the opera was brought forward (performance being allowed because it was sung in a foreign language), pulpit and press thundered in denunciation of it. Mr. Lumley, the manager of Her Majesty's Theatre, came to the defence of the work in a letter to the *Times*, but it was more his purpose to encourage popular excitement and irritate curiosity than to shield the opera from condemnation. He had every reason to be satisfied with the outcome. "La Traviata" had made a complete fiasco, on its production in Italy, where no one dreamed of objecting to the subject-matter of its story; in London there was a loud outcry against the "foul and hideous horrors of the book," and the critics found little to praise in the music; yet the opera scored a tremendous popular success, and helped to rescue Her Majesty's from impending ruin.

CHAPTER X

"AÏDA"

Two erroneous impressions concerning Verdi's "Aïda" may as well as not be corrected at the beginning of a study of that opera: it was not written to celebrate the completion of the Suez Canal, nor to open the Italian Opera-house at Cairo, though the completion of the canal and the inauguration of the theatre were practically contemporaneous with the conception of the plan which gave the world one of Verdi's finest and also most popular operas. It is more difficult to recall a season in any of the great lyric theatres of the world within the last thirty-five years in which "Aïda" was not given than to enumerate a score of productions with particularly fine singers and imposing *mise en scène*. With it Verdi ought to have won a large measure of gratitude from singers and impresarios as well as the fortune which it brought him; for though, like all really fine works, it rewards effort and money bestowed upon it with corresponding and proportionate generosity, it does not depend for its effectiveness on extraordinary vocal outfit or scenic apparel. Fairly well sung and acted and respectably dressed, it always wins the sympathies and warms the en-

thusiasm of an audience the world over. It is seldom thought of as a conventional opera, and yet it is full of conventionalities which do not obtrude themselves simply because there is so much that is individual about its music and its pictures — particularly its pictures. Save for the features of its score which differentiate it from the music of Verdi's other operas and the works of his predecessors and contemporaries, "Aïda" is a companion of all the operas for which Meyerbeer set a model when he wrote his works for the Académie Nationale in Paris — the great pageant operas like "Le Prophète," "Lohengrin," and Goldmark's "Queen of Sheba." With the last it shares one element which brings it into relationship also with a number of much younger and less significant works — operas like Mascagni's "Iris," Puccini's "Madama Butterfly," and Giordano's "Siberia." In the score of "Aïda" there is a slight infusion of that local color which is lavishly employed in decorating its externals. The pomp and pageantry of the drama are Egyptian and ancient; the play's natural and artificial environment is Egyptian and ancient; two bits of its music are Oriental, possibly Egyptian, and not impossibly ancient. But in everything else "Aïda" is an Italian opera. The story plays in ancient Egypt, and its inventor was an archæologist deeply versed in Egyptian antiquities, but I have yet to hear that Mariette Bey, who wrote the *scenario* of the drama, ever claimed an historical foundation for it or pretended that anything in its story was characteris-

tically Egyptian. Circumstances wholly fortuitous give a strong tinge of antiquity and nationalism to the last scene; but, if the ancient Egyptians were more addicted than any other people to burying malefactors alive, the fact is not of record; and the picture as we have it in the opera was not conceived by Mariette Bey, but by Verdi while working hand in hand with the original author of the libretto, which, though designed for an Italian performance, was first written in French prose.

The Italian Theatre in Cairo was built by the khedive, Ismaïl Pacha, and opened in November, 1869. It is extremely likely that the thought of the advantage which would accrue to the house, could it be opened with a new piece by the greatest of living Italian opera composers, had entered the mind of the khedive or his advisers; but it does not seem to have occurred to them in time to insure such a work for the opening. Nevertheless, long before the inauguration of the theatre a letter was sent to Verdi asking him if he would write an opera on an Egyptian subject, and if so, on what terms. The opportunity was a rare one, and appealed to the composer, who had written "Les Vêpres Siciliennes" and "Don Carlos" for Paris, "La Forza del Destino" for St. Petersburg, and had not honored an Italian stage with a new work for ten years. But the suggestion that he state his terms embarrassed him. So he wrote to his friend Muzio and asked him what to do. Muzio had acquired much more worldly wisdom than ever came to the share of the great

genius, and he replied sententiously: "Demand 4000 pounds sterling for your score. If they ask you to go and mount the piece and direct the rehearsals, fix the sum at 6000 pounds."

Verdi followed his friend's advice, and the khedive accepted the terms. At first the opera people in Cairo thought they wanted only the score which carried with it the right of performance, but soon they concluded that they wanted also the presence of the composer, and made him, in vain, munificent offers of money, distinctions, and titles. His real reason for not going to prepare the opera and direct the first performance was a dread of the voyage. To a friend he wrote that he feared that if he went to Cairo they would make a mummy of him. Under the terms of the agreement the khedive sent him 50,000 francs at once, and deposited the balance of 50,000 francs in a bank, to be paid over to the composer on delivery of the score.

The story of "Aïda" came from Mariette Bey, who was then director of the Egyptian Museum at Boulak. Auguste Édouard Mariette was a Frenchman who, while an attaché of the Louvre, in 1850, had gone on a scientific expedition to Egypt for the French government and had discovered the temple of Serapis at Memphis. It was an "enormous structure of granite and alabaster, containing within its enclosure the sarcophagi of the bulls of Apis, from the nineteenth dynasty to the time of the Roman supremacy." After his return to Paris, he was appointed in 1855 assistant conservator of the

Egyptian Museum in the Louvre, and after some further years of service, he went to Egypt again, where he received the title of Bey and an appointment as director of the museum at Boulak. Bayard Taylor visited him in 1851 and 1874, and wrote an account of his explorations and the marvellous collection of antiquities which he had in his care.

Mariette wrote the plot of "Aïda," which was sent to Verdi, and at once excited his liveliest interest. Camille du Locle, who had had a hand in making the books of "Les Vêpres Siciliennes" and "Don Carlos" (and who is also the librettist of Reyer's "Salammbô"), went to Verdi's home in Italy, and under the eye of the composer wrote out the drama in French prose. It was he who gave the world the information that the idea of the double scene in the last act was conceived by Verdi, who, he says, "took a large share in the work." The drama, thus completed, was translated into Italian verse by Antonio Ghislanzoni, who, at the time, was editor of the *Gazetta Musicale*, a journal published in Milan. In his early life Ghislanzoni was a barytone singer. He was a devoted friend and admirer of Verdi's, to whom he paid a glowing tribute in his book entitled "Reminiscenze Artistiche." He died some fifteen or sixteen years ago, and some of his last verses were translations of Tennyson's poems.

The khedive expected to hear his opera by the end of 1870, but there came an extraordinary disturbance of the plan, the cause being nothing less than the war between France and Germany. The

scenery and costumes, which had been made after designs by French artists, were shut up in Paris. At length, on December 24, 1871, the opera had its first performance at Cairo. Considering the sensation which the work created, it seems strange that it remained the exclusive possession of Cairo and a few Italian cities so long as it did, but a personal equation stood in the way of a performance at the Grand Opéra, where it properly belonged. The conduct of the conductor and musicians at the production of "Les Vêpres Siciliennes" had angered Verdi; and when M. Halanzier, the director of the Académie Nationale, asked for the opera in 1873, his request was refused. Thus it happened that the Théâtre Italien secured the right of first performance in Paris. It was brought out there on April 22, 1876, and had sixty-eight representations within three years. The original *King* in the French performance was Édouard de Reszke. It was not until March 22, 1880, that "Aïda" reached the Grand Opéra. M. Vaucorbeil, the successor of Halanzier, visited Verdi at his home and succeeded in persuading him not only to give the performing rights to the national institution, but also to assist in its production. Maurel was the *Amonasro* of the occasion. The composer was greatly fêted, and at a dinner given in his honor by President Grévy was made a Grand Officer of the National Order of the Legion of Honor.

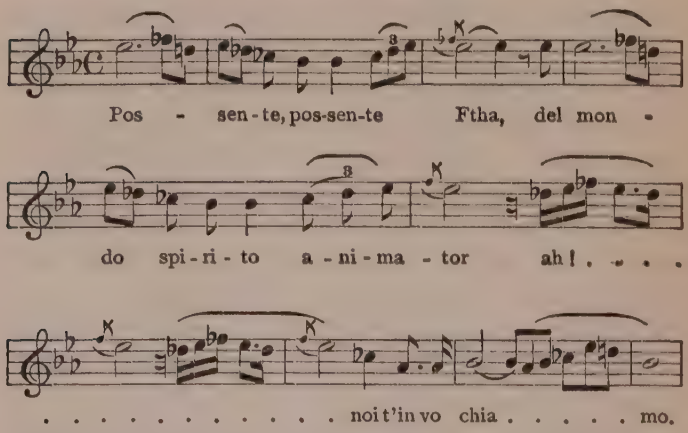
The opening scene of the opera is laid at Memphis, a fact which justifies the utmost grandeur in

the stage furniture, and is explained by Mariette's interest in that place. It was he who helped moderns to realize the ancient magnificence of the city described by Diodorus. It was the first capital of the united kingdom of upper and lower Egypt, the chief seat of religion and learning, the site of the temples of Ptah, Isis, Serapis, Phra, and the sacred bull Apis. Mariette here, on his first visit to Egypt, unearthed an entire avenue of sphinxes leading to the Serapeum, over four thousand statues, reliefs, and inscriptions, eight gigantic sculptures, and many other evidences of a supremely great city. He chose his scenes with a view to an exhibition of the ancient grandeur. In a hall of the Royal Palace, flanked by a colonnade with statues and flowering shrubs, and commanding a view of the city's palaces and temples and the pyramids, *Radames*, an Egyptian soldier, and *Ramfis*, a high priest, discuss a report that the Ethiopians are in revolt in the valley of the Nile, and that Thebes is threatened. The high priest has consulted Isis, and the goddess has designated who shall be the leader of Egypt's army against the rebels. An inspiring thought comes into the mind of *Radames*. What if he should be the leader singled out to crush the rebellion, and be received in triumph on his return? A consummation devoutly to be wished, not for his own glory alone, but for the sake of his love, *Aïda*, whose beauty he sings in a romance ("Celeste Aïda") of exquisite loveliness and exaltation. *Amneris*, the daughter of the King of Egypt (Ma-

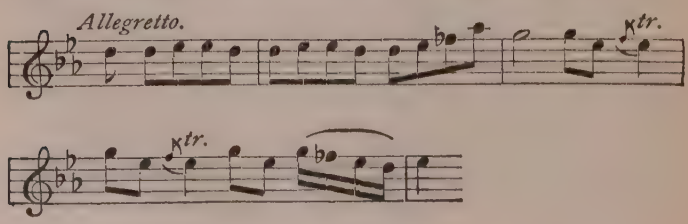
riette gives him no name, and so avoids possible historical complications), enters. She is in love with *Radames*, and eager to know what it is that has so illumined his visage with joy. He tells her of his ambition, but hesitates when she asks him if no gentler dream had tenanted his heart. *Aïda* approaches, and the perturbation of her lover is observed by *Amneris*, who affects love for her slave (for such *Aïda* is), welcomes her as a sister, and bids her tell the cause of her grief. *Aïda* is the daughter of Ethiopia's king; but she would have the princess believe that her tears are caused by anxiety for Egypt's safety. The *King* appears with *Ramfis* and a royal retinue, and learns from a messenger that the Ethiopians have invaded Egypt and, under their king, *Amonasro*, are marching on Thebes. The *King* announces that Isis has chosen *Radames* to be the leader of Egypt's hosts. *Amneris* places the royal banner in his eager hand, and to the sounds of a patriotic march he is led away to the temple of Ptah (the Egyptian Vulcan), there to receive his consecrated armor and arms. "Return a victor!" shout the hosts, and *Aïda*, carried away by her love, joins in the cry; but, left alone, she reproaches herself for impiousness in uttering words which imply a wish for the destruction of her country, her father, and her kinsmen. (*Scena:* "Ritorna vincitor.") Yet could she wish for the defeat and the death of the man she loves? She prays the gods to pity her sufferings ("Numi, pieta"). Before a colossal figure of the god in the temple of Ptah, while the sacred

fires rise upward from the tripods, and priestesses move through the figures of the sacred dance or chant a hymn to the Creator, Preserver, Giver, of Life and Light, the consecrated sword is placed in the hands of *Radames*.

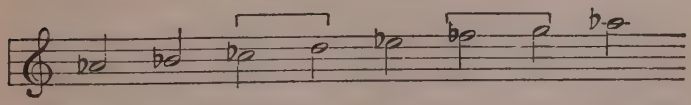
It is in this scene that the local color is not confined to externals alone, but infuses the music as well. Very skilfully Verdi makes use of two melodies which are saturated with the languorous spirit of the East. The first is the invocation of Ptah, chanted by an invisible priestess to the accompaniment of a harp:—



The second is the melody of the sacred dance:—



The tunes are said to be veritable Oriental strains which some antiquary (perhaps Mariette himself) put into the hands of Verdi. The fact that their characteristic elements were nowhere else employed by the composer, though he had numerous opportunities for doing so, would seem to indicate that Verdi was chary about venturing far into the territory of musical nationalism. Perhaps he felt that his powers were limited in this direction, or that he might better trust to native expression of the mood into which the book had wrought him. The limitation of local color in his music is not mentioned as a defect in the opera, for it is replaced at the supreme moments, especially that at the opening of the third act, with qualities far more entrancing than were likely to have come from the use of popular idioms. Yet, the two Oriental melodies having been mentioned, it is well to look at their structure to discover the source of their singular charm. There is no mystery as to the cause in the minds of students of folk-song. The tunes are evolved from a scale so prevalent among peoples of Eastern origin that it has come to be called the Oriental scale. Its distinguishing characteristic is an interval, which contains three semitones: —

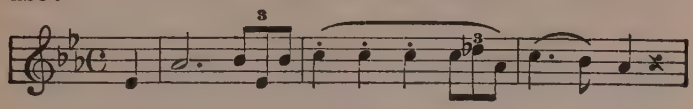


The interval occurring twice in this scale is enclosed in brackets. Its characteristic effect is most

obvious when the scale is played downward. A beautiful instance of its artistic use is in Rubinstein's song "Der Asra." The ancient synagogal songs of the Jews are full of it, and it is one of the distinguishing marks of the folk-songs of Hungary (the other being rhythmical), as witness the "Rakoczy March." In some of the Eastern songs it occurs once, in some twice (as in the case of the melodies printed above), and there are instances of a triple use in the folk-songs of the modern Greeks.

Act II. News of the success of the Egyptian expedition against the Ethiopians has reached *Amneris*, whose slaves attire her for the scene of *Radames's* triumph. The slaves sing of Egypt's victory and of love, the princess of her longing, and Moorish slaves dance before her to dispel her melancholy. *Aïda* comes, weighed down by grief. *Amneris* lavishes words of sympathy upon her, and succeeds in making her betray her love for *Radames* by saying that he had been killed in battle. Then she confesses the falsehood and proclaims her own passion and purpose to crush her rival, who shall appear at the triumph of *Radames* as her slave. *Aïda's* pride rebels for the moment, and she almost betrays her own exalted station as the daughter of a king. As a slave she accompanies the princess to the entrance gate of Thebes, where the *King*, the priests, and a vast concourse of people are to welcome *Radames* and witness his triumphal entry. *Radames*, with his troops and a horde of Ethiopian prisoners, comes into the city in a gorgeous pageant.

The procession is headed by two groups of trumpeters, who play a march melody, the stirring effect of which is greatly enhanced by the characteristic tone quality of the long, straight instruments which they use: —



A word about these trumpets. In shape, they recall antique instruments, and the brilliancy of their tone is due partly to the calibre of their straight tubes and partly to the fact that nearly all the tones used are open — that is, natural harmonics of the fundamental tones of the tubes. There is an anachronism in the circumstance that they are provided with valves (which were not invented until some thousands of years after the period of the drama), but only one of the valves is used. The first trumpets are in the key of A-flat and the second B-natural, a peculiarly stirring effect being produced by the sudden shifting of the key of the march when the second group of trumpeters enters on the scene.

The *King* greets *Radames* with an embrace, bids him receive the wreath of victory from the hands of his daughter and ask whatever boon he will as a reward for his services. He asks, first, that the prisoners be brought before the *King*. Among them *Aïda* recognizes her father, who is disguised as an officer of the Ethiopian army. The two are in each other's arms in a moment, but only long

enough for *Amonasro* to caution his daughter not to betray him. He bravely confesses that he had fought for king and country, and pleads for clemency for the prisoners. They join in the petition, as does *Aïda,* and though the priests warn and protest, *Radames* asks the boon of their lives and freedom, and the *King* grants it. Also, without the asking, he bestows the hand of his daughter upon the victorious general, who receives the undesired honor with consternation.

Transporting beauty rests upon the scene which opens the third act. The moon shines brightly on the rippling surface of the Nile and illumines a temple of Isis, perched amongst the tropical foliage which crowns a rocky height. The silvery sheen is spread also over the music, which arises from the orchestra like a light mist burdened with sweet odors. *Amneris* enters the temple to ask the blessing of the goddess upon her marriage, and the pious canticle of the servitors within floats out on the windless air. A tone of tender pathos breathes through the music which comes with *Aïda,* who is to hold secret converse with her lover. Will he come? And if so, will he speak a cruel farewell and doom her to death within the waters of the river? A vision of her native land, its azure skies, verdant vales, perfumed breezes, rises before her. Shall she never see them more? Her father comes upon her. He knows of her passion for *Radames,* but also of her love for home and kindred. He puts added hues into the picture with which her heavy fancy had

dallied, and then beclouds it all with an account of homes and temples profaned, maidens ravished, grandsires, mothers, children, slain by the oppressor. Will she aid in the deliverance? She can by learning from her lover by which path the Egyptians will march against the Ethiopians, who are still in the field, though their king is taken. That she will not do. But *Amonasro* breaks down her resolution. Hers will be the responsibility for torrents of blood, the destruction of cities, the devastation of her country. No longer his daughter she, but a slave of the Pharaohs! Her lover comes. She affects to repulse him because of his betrothal to *Amneris*, but he protests his fidelity and discloses his plan. The Ethiopians are in revolt again. Again he will defeat them, and, returning again in triumph, he will tell the *King* of his love for her and thereafter live in the walks of peace. But *Aïda* tells him that the vengeance of *Amneris* will pursue her, and urges him to fly with her. Reluctantly he consents, and she, with apparent innocence, asks by which path they shall escape the soldiery. Through the gorge of Napata; 'twill be unpeopled till to-morrow, for it has been chosen as the route by which the Egyptian advance shall be made. Exulting, *Amonasro* rushes from his place of concealment. At the gorge of Napata will he place his troops — he the King of Ethiopia! *Radames* has betrayed his country. *Amneris* comes out of the temple, and *Amonasro* is about to poignard her when *Radames* throws himself between. To the high priest, *Ramfis*, he yields him-

self and his sword. *Amonasro* drags *Aïda* away with him.

We reach the last act of the drama. *Radames* is to be tried for treason in having betrayed a secret of war to his country's enemy. *Amneris* fain would save him were he to renounce *Aïda* and accept her love. She offers on such terms to intercede for him with her father, the king. From her *Radames* learns that *Aïda* escaped the guards who slew her father. He is resolute to die rather than prove faithless to her, and is led away to the subterranean trial chamber. *Amneris,* crouched without, hears the accusing voices of the priests and the awful silence which follows each accusation; for *Radames* refuses to answer the charges. The priests pronounce sentence:—Burial alive! *Amneris* hurls curses after them, but they depart, muttering, "Death to the traitor!"

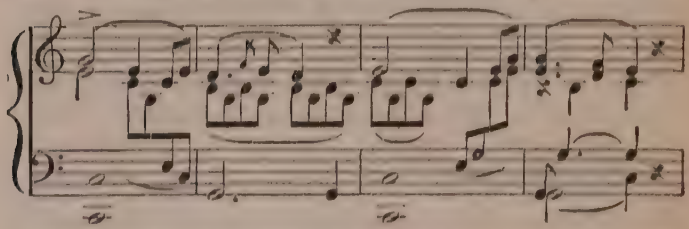
Radames is immured in a vault beneath the temple of Vulcan, whose sacred priestesses move in solemn steps above, while he gropes in the darkness below. Never again shall light greet his eyes, nor sight of *Aïda.* A groan. A phantom rises before him, and *Aïda* is at his side. She had foreseen the doom of her lover, and entered the tomb before him to die in his arms. Together they say their farewell to the vale of tears, and their streaming eyes have a prevision of heaven. Above in the temple a figure, shrouded in black, kneels upon the stone which seals the vault and implores Isis to cease her resentment and give her adored one peace. It is *Amneris.*

CHAPTER XI

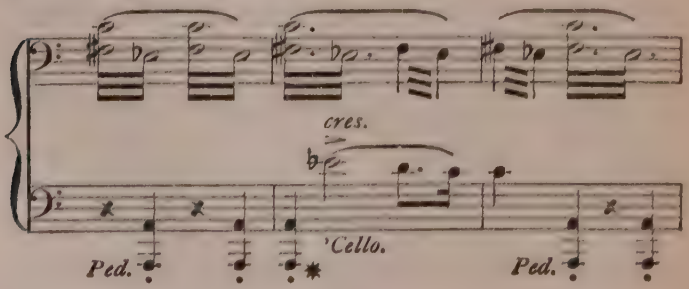
"DER FREISCHÜTZ"

A DESCRIPTION of Carl Maria von Weber's opera, "Der Freischütz," ought to begin with a study of the overture, since that marvellous composition has lived on and on in the concert-rooms of the world without loss of popularity for nearly a century, while the opera which it introduces has periodically come and gone according to popular whim or the artistic convictions or caprices of managers in all the countries which cultivate opera, except Germany. Why Germany forms an exception to the rule will find an explanation when the character of the opera and its history come under investigation. The overture, notwithstanding its extraordinary charm, is only an exalted example of the *pot-pourri* class of introductions (though in the classic sonata form), which composers were in the habit of writing when this opera came into existence, and which is still imitated in an ignoble way by composers of ephemeral operettas. It is constructed on a conventional model, and its thematic material is drawn from the music of the opera; but, like the prelude to Wagner's lyric comedy, "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg," it presents the contents of the play in the form of what many years after its composition came to be called a symphonic poem, and illustrates the ideal which was in Gluck's mind

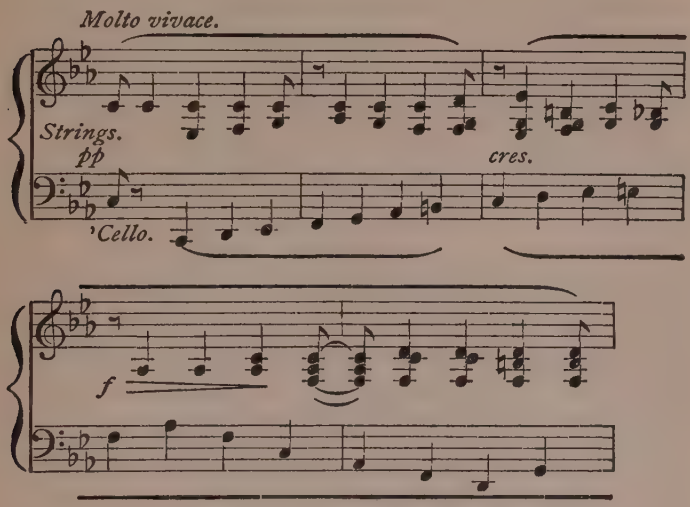
when, in the preface to "Alceste," he said, "I imagined that the overture ought to prepare the audience for the action of the piece, and serve as a kind of argument to it." The atmosphere of the opera is that which pervades the sylvan life of Germany — its actualities and its mysteries, the two elements having equal potency. Into the peacefulness of the woods the French horns ("Forest horns," the Germans call them) usher us at once with the hymn which they sing after a few introductory measures.



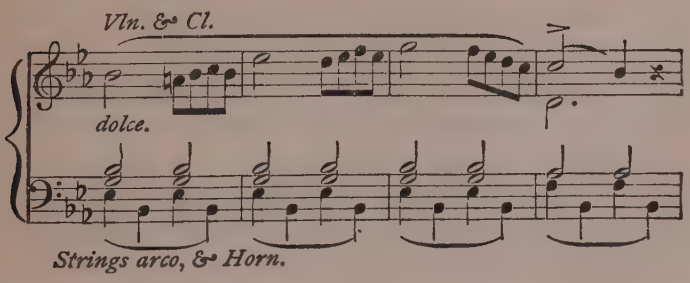
But no sooner do we yield to the caress of this mood than there enters the supernatural element which invests the tragical portion of the story. Ominous drum beats under a dissonant *tremolo* of the strings and deep tones of the clarinets, a plangent declamatory phrase of the violoncellos: —



tell us of the emotions of the hero when he feels himself deserted by Heaven; the agitated principal subject of the main body of the overture (*Molto vivace*): —



proclaims his terror at the thought that he has fallen into the power of the Evil One, while the jubilant second theme: —



gives voice to the happiness of the heroine and the triumph of love and virtue which is the outcome of the drama.

The first glimpse of the opera reveals an open space in a forest and in it an inn and a target-shooting range. *Max*, a young assistant to the Chief Forester of a Bohemian principality, is seated at a table with a mug of beer before him, his face and attitude the picture of despondency. Hard by, huntsmen and others are grouped around *Kilian*, a young peasant who fires the last shot in a contest of marksmanship as the scene is disclosed. He hits off the last remaining star on the target, and is noisily acclaimed as *Schützenkönig* (King of the Marksmen), and celebrated in a lusty song by the spectators, who decorate the victor, and forming a procession bearing the trophies of the match, march around the glade. As they pass *Max* they point their fingers and jeer at him. *Kilian* joins in the sport until *Max's* fuming ill-humor can brook the humiliation no longer; he leaps up, seizes the lapel of *Kilian's* coat, and draws his hunting-knife. A deadly quarrel seems imminent, but is averted by the coming of *Cuno*, Chief Forester, and *Caspar*, who, like *Max*, is one of his assistants. To the reproaches of *Cuno*, who sees the mob surging around *Max*, *Kilian* explains that there was no ill-will in the mockery of him, the crowd only following an old custom which permitted the people to make sport of a contestant who failed to hit the target, and thus forfeited the right to make trial for the king-

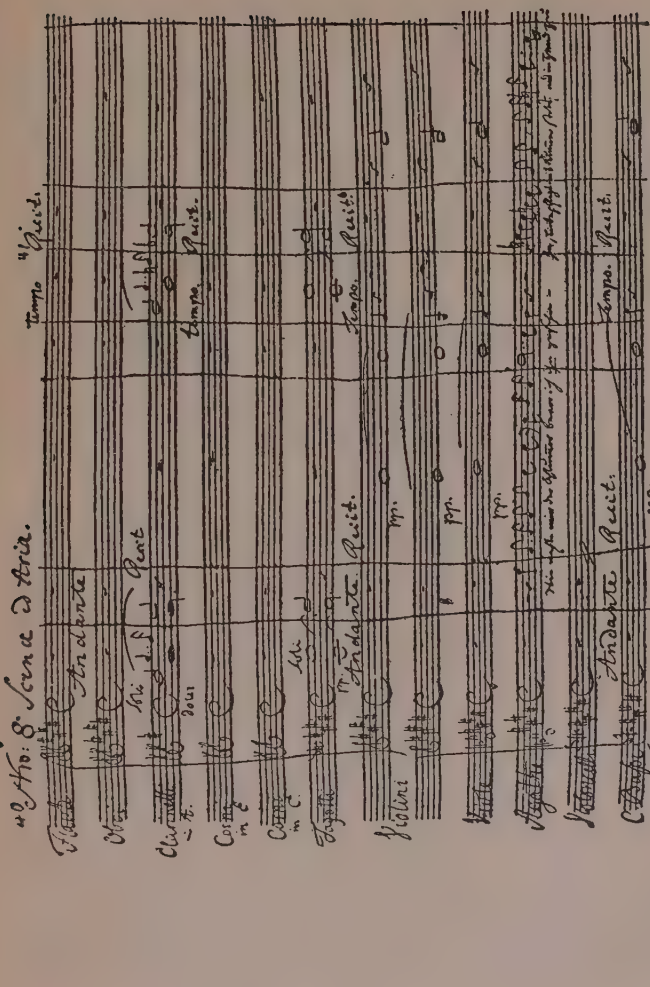
ship. *Cuno* is amazed that a mere peasant should have defeated one of his foresters, and that one the affianced lover of his daughter, *Agathe*, and who, as his son-in-law, would inherit his office, provided he could prove his fitness for it by a trial shot on the wedding day. That day had been set for the morrow. How the custom of thus providing for the successorship originated, *Cuno* now relates in answer to the questions of one of the party. His great-grandfather, also bearer of the name Cuno, had been one of the rangers of the prince who ruled the dominion in his day. Once upon a time, in the course of a hunt, the dogs started a stag who bounded toward the party with a man tied to his back. It was thus that poachers were sometimes punished. The Prince's pity was stirred, and he promised that whoever should shoot the stag without harming the man should receive the office of Chief Forester, to be hereditary in the family, and the tenancy of a hunting lodge near by. Cuno, moved more by pity than hope of reward, attempted the feat and succeeded. The Prince kept his promise, but on a suggestion that the old hunter may have used a charmed bullet, he made the hereditary succession contingent upon the success of a trial shot. Before telling the tale, *Cuno* had warned *Max* to have a care, for should he fail in the trial shot on the morrow, his consent to the marriage between him and *Agathe* would be withdrawn. *Max* had suspected that his ill luck for a month past, during which time he had brought home not a single trophy

of bird or beast, was due to some malign influence, the cause of which he was unable to fathom. He sings of the prowess and joys that once were his (Aria: "Durch die Wälder, durch die Auen"), but falls into a moody dread at the thought that Heaven has forsaken him and given him over to the powers of darkness. It is here that the sinister music, mentioned in the outline of the overture, enters the drama. It accompanies the appearance of *Samiel* (the Wild Huntsman, or Black Hunter, — in short, the Devil), and we have thus in Von Weber's opera a pre-Wagnerian example of the *Leitmotif* of the Wagnerian commentators. *Caspar* returns to the scene, which all the other personages have left to join in a dance, and finds his associate in the depths of despair. He plies *Max* with wine, and, affecting sympathy with him in his misfortunes, gradually insinuates that there is a means of insuring success on the morrow. *Max* remains sceptical until *Caspar* hands him his rifle and bids him shoot at an eagle flying overhead. The bird is plainly out of rifle range, a mere black dot against the twilight sky; but *Max*, scarcely aiming, touches the trigger and an eagle of gigantic size comes hurtling through the air and falls at his feet. *Max* is convinced that there is a sure way to win his bride on the morrow. He asks *Caspar* if he has more bullets like the one just spent. No; that was the hunter's last; but more might be obtained, provided the effort be made that very night. The moment was propitious. It was the second of three days in which the sun was in the

constellation of the Archer; at midnight there would occur an eclipse of the moon. What a fortunate coincidence that all the omens should be fair at so momentous a juncture of *Max's* affairs! The fear of losing his bride overcomes *Max's* scruples; he agrees to meet the tempter in the Wolf's Glen, a spot of evil repute, at midnight, and at least witness the casting of more of the charmed bullets.

At the moment when *Max's* shot brought down the eagle, a portrait of the original Cuno fell from the wall of the cottage occupied by his descendant; and when the second act begins, we see *Aennchen*, a cousin of *Agathe's*, putting it back in its place. *Aennchen* is inclined to be playful and roguish, and serves as a pretty foil to the sentimental *Agathe*. She playfully scolds the nail which she is hammering into the wall again for so rudely dropping the old ranger to the floor, and seeks to dispel the melancholy which has obsessed her cousin by singing songs about the bad companionship of the blues and the humors of courtship. She succeeds, in a measure, and *Agathe* confesses that she had felt a premonition of danger ever since a pious *Hermit*, to whom she had gone for counsel in the course of the day, had warned her of the imminency of a calamity which he could not describe. The prediction seemed to have been fulfilled in the falling of the picture, which had slightly hurt her, but might easily have killed her. *Aennchen* urges her to go to bed, but she refuses, saying she shall not retire for sleep until *Max* has come. *Agathe* sings the *scena* which has

clung to our concert-rooms as persistently as the overture. The slow portion of the aria ("Leise, leise, fromme Weise"), like the horn music at the beginning of the overture, has found its way into the Protestant hymn-books of England and America, and its *Allegro* furnishes forth the jubilant music of the instrumental introduction to the opera. Berlioz in his book "A Travers Chants" writes in a fine burst of enthusiasm of this *scena:* "It is impossible for any listener to fail to hear the sighs of the orchestra during the prayer of the virtuous maiden who awaits the coming of her affianced lover; or the strange hum in which the alert ear imagines it hears the rustling of the tree-tops. It even seems as if the darkness grew deeper and colder at that magical modulation to C major. What a sympathetic shudder comes over one at the cry: ''Tis he! 'tis he!' No, no. It must be confessed, there is no other aria as beautiful as this. No master, whether German, Italian, or French, was ever able to delineate, as is done here in a single scene, holy prayer, melancholy, disquiet, pensiveness, the slumber of nature, the mysterious harmony of the starry skies, the torture of expectation, hope, uncertainty, joy, frenzy, delight, love delirious! And what an orchestra to accompany these noble song melodies! What inventiveness! What ingenious discoveries! What treasures of sudden inspiration! These flutes in the depths, this quartet of violins; these passages in sixths between violas and 'cellos; this *crescendo* bursting into refulgence at the close;



Facsimile of Full Score of the Beginning of Agatha's Great Aria, from "Der Freischütz."

these pauses during which the passions seem to be gathering themselves together in order to launch their forces anew with greater vehemence! No, this piece has not its fellow! Here is an art that is divine! This is poetry; this is love itself!"

Max comes at last, but he is preoccupied, and his words and acts do little to reassure *Agathe*. She wants to know what luck he had at the shooting-match, and he replies that he did not participate in the target-shooting, but had nevertheless been marvellously lucky, pointing to the eagle's feather in his hat as proof. At the same moment he notices the blood upon his sweetheart's hair, and her explanation of the falling of the portrait of her ancestor just as the clock struck seven greatly disturbs him. *Agathe*, too, lapses into gloomy brooding; she has fears for the morrow, and the thought of the monstrous eagle terrifies her. And now *Max*, scarcely come, announces that he must go; he had shot, he says, a stag deep in the woods near the Wolf's Glen, indeed, and must bring it in lest the peasants steal it. In a trio *Aennchen* recalls the uncanny nature of the spot, *Agathe* warns against the sin of tempting Providence and begs him to stay; but *Max* protests his fearlessness and the call of duty, and hurries away to meet *Caspar*, at the appointed time in the appointed place. We see him again in the Wolf's Glen, but *Caspar* is there before him. The glen lies deep in the mountains. A cascade tumbles down the side of a mighty crag on the one hand; on the other sits a monstrous owl

on the branch of a blasted tree, blinking evilly. A path leads steeply down to a great cave. The moon throws a lurid light on the scene and shows us *Caspar* in his shirt-sleeves preparing for his infernal work. He arranges black stones in a circle around a skull. His tools lie beside him: a ladle, bullet-mould, and eagle's-wing fan. The high voices of an invisible chorus utter the cry of the owl, which the orchestra mixes with gruesome sounds, while bass voices monotonously chant: —

> Poisoned dew the moon hath shed,
> Spider's web is dyed with red;
> Ere to-morrow's sun hath died
> Death will wed another bride.
> Ere the moon her course has run
> Deeds of darkness will be done.[1]

On the last stroke of a distant bell which rings midnight, *Caspar* thrusts his hunting-knife into the skull, raises it on high, turns around three times, and summons his familiar: —

> By th' enchanter's skull, oh, hear,
> *Samiel, Samiel,* appear !

The demon answers in person, and the reason of *Caspar's* temptation of *Max* is made plain. He has sold himself to the devil for the charmed bullets, the last of which had brought down the eagle, and the time for the delivery of his soul is to come on the morrow. He asks a respite on the promise to deliver another victim into the demon's hands, — his com-

[1] Natalia Macfarren's translation.

panion *Max.* What, asks the *Black Huntsman,* is the proffered victim's desire? The magical bullets.

> Sechse treffen,
> Sieben äffen!

warns *Samiel,* and *Caspar* suggests that the seventh bullet be directed to the heart of the bride; her death would drive both lover and father to despair. But *Samiel* says that as yet he has no power over the maiden; he will claim his victim on the morrow, *Max* or him who is already his bondsman. *Caspar* prepares for the moulding. The skull disappears, and in its place rises a small furnace in which fagots are aglow. Ghostly birds, perched on the trees round about in the unhallowed spot, fan the fire with their wings. *Max* appears on a crag on one side of the glen and gazes down. The sights and sounds below affright him; but he summons up his courage and descends part way. Suddenly his steps are arrested by a vision of his dead mother, who appears on the opposite side of the gulch and raises her hand warningly. *Caspar* mutters a prayer for help to the fiend and bids *Max* look again. Now the figure is that of *Agathe,* who seems about to throw herself into the mountain torrent. The sight nerves him and he hurries down. The moon enters into an eclipse, and *Caspar* begins his infernal work after cautioning *Max* not to enter the circle nor utter a word, no matter what he sees or who comes to join them. Into the melting-pot *Caspar* now puts the ingredients of the charm: some lead, bits of

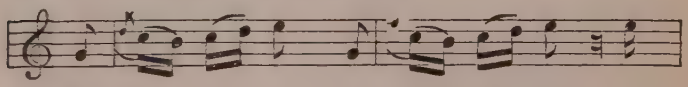
broken glass from a church window, a bit of mercury, three bullets that have already hit their mark, the right eye of a lapwing, the left of a lynx; then speaks the conjuration formula: —

> Thou who roamst at midnight hour,
> *Samiel, Samiel,* thy pow'r !
> Spirit dread, be near this night
> And complete the mystic rite.
> By the shade of murderer's dead,
> Do thou bless the charmèd lead.
> Seven the number we revere;
> *Samiel, Samiel,* appear !

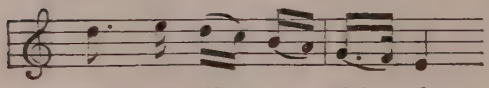
The contents of the ladle commence to hiss and burn with a greenish flame; a cloud obscures the moon wholly, and the scene is lighted only by the fire under the melting-pot, the owl's eyes, and the phosphorescent glow of the decaying oaks. As he casts the bullets, *Caspar* calls out their number, which the echoes repeat. Strange phenomena accompany each moulding; night-birds come flying from the dark woods and gather around the fire; a black boar crashes through the bushes and rushes through the glen; a hurricane hurtles through the trees, breaking their tops and scattering the sparks from the furnace; four fiery wheels roll by; the Wild Hunt dashes through the air; thunder, lightning, and hail fill the air, flames dart from the earth, and meteors fall from the sky; at the last the *Black Hunter* himself appears and grasps at *Max's* hand; the forester crosses himself and falls to the earth, where *Caspar* already lies stretched out uncon-

scious. *Samiel* disappears, and the tempest abates. *Max* raises himself convulsively and finds his companion still lying on the ground face downward.

At the beginning of the third act the wedding day has dawned. It finds *Agathe* kneeling in prayer robed for the wedding. She sings a cavatina ("Und ob die Wolken sie verhülle") which proclaims her trust in Providence. *Aennchen* twits her for having wept; but "bride's tears and morning rain — neither does for long remain." *Agathe* has been tortured by a dream, and *Aennchen* volunteers to interpret it. The bride had dreamt that she had been transformed into a white dove and was flying from tree to tree when *Max* discharged his gun at her. She fell stricken, but immediately afterward was her own proper self again and saw a monstrous black bird of prey wallowing in its blood. *Aennchen* explains all as reflexes of the incidents of the previous night — the work on the white bridal dress, the terrible black feather on *Max's* hat; and merrily tells a ghostly tale of a nocturnal visitor to her sainted aunt which turned out to be the watch-dog. Enter the bridesmaids with their song: —



Wir win - den dir den Jung - fern-kranz mit
The bri - dal wreath for thee we bind, With



etc.

veil - chen - blau - er Sei - de,
silk - en thread of a - zure,

Nearly three generations of Germans have sung this song; it has accompanied them literally from the cradle to the grave. When Ludwig Geyer, Richard Wagner's stepfather, lay dying, the lad, then seven years old, was told to play the little piece in a room adjoining the sick chamber. The dying man had been concerned about the future of his stepson. He listened. "What if he should have talent for music?" Long years after the mother told this story, and the son, when he became famous as a composer, repeated it in one of his autobiographical writings, and told with what awe his childish eyes had looked on the composer as he passed by the door on the way to and from the theatre.

Evil omens pursue *Agathe* even on her bridal morn. The bridesmaids are still singing to her when *Aennchen* brings a box which she thinks contains the bridal wreath. All fall back in dismay when out comes a funeral wreath of black. Even *Aennchen's* high spirits are checked for a moment; but she finds an explanation. Old Cuno has tumbled from the wall a second time; but she herself assumes the blame: the nail was rusty and she not an adept with the hammer. The action now hastens to its close. *Prince Ottokar*, with his retainers, is present at the festival at which *Max* is to justify *Cuno's* choice of him as a son-in-law. The choice meets with the *Prince's* approval. The moment approaches for the trial shot, and *Max* stands looking at the last of his charmed bullets, which seems to weigh with ominous heaviness in his hand. He

had taken four of the seven and *Caspar* three. Of the four he had spent three in unnecessary shots; but he hopes that *Caspar* has kept his. Of course *Caspar* has done nothing of the kind. It is suggested that *Max* shoot at once, not awaiting the arrival of his betrothed, lest the sight of her make him nervous. The *Prince* points to a white dove as the mark, and *Max* lifts his gun. At the moment *Agathe* rushes forward, crying, "Do not shoot; I am the dove!" The bird flies toward a tree which *Caspar*, impatient for the coming of his purposed victim, had climbed. *Max* follows it with his gun and pulls the trigger. *Agathe* and *Caspar* both fall to the ground. The holy man of the woods raises *Agathe*, who is unhurt; but *Caspar* dies with curses for everything upon his lips. The devil has cared for his own and claimed his forfeit. *Ottokar* orders his corpse thrown amongst the carrion in the Wolf's Glen and turns to *Max* for an explanation. He confesses his wrong and is ordered out of the *Prince's* dominion; but on the intercession of *Cuno*, *Agathe*, and the *Hermit* the sentence is commuted to a year of probation, at the end of which time he shall marry his love. But the traditional trial shot is abolished.

* * *

Though there are a dozen different points of view from which Weber's opera "Der Freischütz" is of fascinating interest, it is almost impossible for any one except a German to understand fully what the

opera means now to the people from whose loins the composer sprung, and quite impossible to realize what it meant to them at the time of its production. "Der Freischütz" is spoken of in all the handbooks as a "national" opera. There are others to which the term might correctly and appropriately be applied — German, French, Italian, Bohemian, Hungarian, Russian; but there never was an opera, and there is no likelihood that there ever will be one, so intimately bound up with the loves, feelings, sentiments, emotions, superstitions, social customs, and racial characteristics of a people as this is with the loves, feelings, sentiments, emotions, superstitions, social customs, and racial characteristics of the Germans. In all its elements as well as in its history it is inextricably intertwined with the fibres of German nationality. It could not have been written at another time than it was; it could not have been written by any other composer living at that time; it could not have been conceived by any artist not saturated with Germanism. It is possible to argue one's self into a belief of these things, but only the German can feel them. Yet there is no investigator of comparative mythology and religion who ought not to go to the story of the opera to find an illustration of one of the pervasive laws of his science; there is no folklorist who ought not to be drawn to its subject; no student of politics and sociology who cannot find valuable teachings in its history; no critic who can afford to ignore its significance in connection with the evolution of musical

styles and schools; no biographer who can fail to observe the kinship which the opera establishes between the first operatic romanticist and him who brought the romantic movement to its culmination; that is, between Carl Maria von Weber and Richard Wagner. It is even a fair subject for the study of the scientific psychologist, for, though the story of the opera is generally supposed to be a fanciful structure reared on a legendary foundation, it was a veritable happening which gave it currency a century ago and brought it to the notice of the composer; and this happening may have an explanation in some of the psychical phenomena to which modern science is again directing attention, such as hypnotism, animal magnetism, and the like.

I am here not at all fanciful. Some thirty years ago I came across a pamphlet published by Dr. J. G. Th. Grässe, a Saxon Court Councillor, in which he traced the origin of the story at the base of "Der Freischütz" to a confession made in open court in a Bohemian town in 1710. Grässe found the story in a book entitled "Monathliche Unterredungen aus dem Reich der Geister," published in Leipsic in 1730, the author of which stated that he had drawn the following statement of facts from judicial records: In 1710 in a town in Bohemia, George Schmid, a clerk, eighteen years old, who was a passionate lover of target-shooting, was persuaded by a hunter to join in an enterprise for moulding charmed bullets on July 30, the same being St. Abdon's Day. The hunter promised to aid the young man in casting

sixty-three bullets, of which sixty were to hit infallibly and three to miss just as certainly. The two men provided themselves with coals, moulds, etc., and betook themselves at nightfall to a cross-roads. There the hunter drew a circle with his knife and placed mysterious characters, the meaning of which his companion did not know, around the edge. This done, he told the clerk to step within the ring, take off his clothing, and make denial of God and the Holy Trinity. The bullets, said the hunter, must all be cast between eleven o'clock and midnight, or the clerk would fall into the clutches of the devil. At eleven o'clock the dead coals began to glow of their own accord, and the two men began the moulding, although all manner of ghostly apparitions tried to hinder them. At last there came a horseman in black, who demanded the bullets which had been cast. The hunter refused to yield them up, and in revenge the horseman threw something into the fire which sent out so noisome an odor that the two venturesome men fell half dead within the circle. The hunter escaped, and, as it turned out subsequently, betook himself to the Salzkammergut, near Salzburg; but the clerk was found lying at the cross-roads and carried into town. There he made a complete confession in court, and because he had had intercourse with the Evil One, doubtless, was condemned to be burned to death. In consideration of his youth, however, the sentence was commuted to imprisonment at hard labor for six years.

In the legend of the Wild Huntsman, who under

the name of Samiel purchases the souls of men with his magic bullets, the folklorist and student of the evolution of religions sees one of many evidences of ancient mythology perverted to bring it into the service of Christianity. Originally the Wild Huntsman was Odin (or Wotan). The missionaries to the Germans, finding it difficult to root out belief in the ancient deities, gave their attributes to saints in a few cases, but for the greater part transformed them into creatures of evil. It was thus that Frau Holle (or Holda) became a wicked Venus, as we shall see in the next chapter. The little spotted beetle which English and American children call ladybug or lady-bird (that is, the bug or bird of our Lady), the Germans *Marienkäferchen*, and the French *La bête du bon Dieu*, was sacred to Holda; and though the name of the Virgin Mary was bestowed upon it in the long ago, it still remains a love oracle, as the little ones know who bid it —

> Fly to the East,
> And fly to the West,
> And fly to the one that I love best!

It was the noise of Wotan's hunting train which the ancient Germans heard when the storms of winter howled and whistled through the deep woods of the Northland; but in time it came to be the noise of the Wild Hunt. In Thuringia the rout headed by Frau Holda and the Wild Huntsman issues in the Yuletide from the cave in the Hörselberg, which is the scene of *Tannhäuser's* adventure

with *Venus* in Wagner's opera, and Holda is the mother of many of the uncanny creatures which strike terror to the souls of the unlucky huntsmen who chance to espy them.

From the story drawn from the records of the Bohemian law court, it is plain that to make a compact with the Wild Huntsman was a much more gruesome and ceremonious proceeding than that which took place between *Faust* and the Evil One in the operas of Gounod and Boito. In both these instances a scratch of the pen sufficed, and the deliberations which preceded the agreement were conducted in a decorous and businesslike manner. But to invoke Samiel and obtain his gifts was a body, mind, and nerve-racking business. In some particulars the details differed a little from those testified to by the Bohemian clerk. In the first place, the Devil's customer had to repair to a crossroads of a Friday between midnight and one o'clock when the moon was in an eclipse and the sun in Sagittarius. If in such a place and at such a time he drew a circle around himself with his hunting-spear and called "Samiel!" three times, that worthy would appear, and a bargain might be driven with him for his wares, which consisted of seven magical bullets ("free bullets," they were called), which were then cast under the eye of the Evil One and received his "blessing." The course of six of them rested with the "free shooter," but the seventh belonged to Samiel, who might direct it wheresoever he wished. The price of these bullets was the soul of the man

who moulded them, at the end of three years; but it was the privilege of the bondsman to purchase a respite before the expiration of the period by delivering another soul into the clutches of the demon.

Weber used all these details in his opera, and added to them the fantastic terrors of the Wild Hunt and the Wolf's Glen. Of this favored abode of the Evil One, Wagner gave a vivid description in an essay on "Der Freischütz" which he wrote for the *Gazette musicale* in May, 1841, when the opera was preparing, under the hand of Berlioz, for representation at the Grand Opéra in Paris. Wagner's purpose in writing the essay was to acquaint the Parisians with the contents and spirit of the piece, make them understand its naïve Teutonism, and also to save it from the maltreatment and mutilation which he knew it would have to suffer if it were to be made to conform to the conventions of the Académie. He wanted to preserve the spoken dialogue and keep out the regulation ballet, for the sake of which he had to make changes in his "Tannhäuser" twenty years later. He failed in both efforts, and afterward wrote an account of the performance for a German newspaper, which is one of the best specimens of the feuilleton style which his sojourn in Paris provoked. There was no need of telling his countrymen what the Wolf's Glen was, for it had been the most familiar of all scenes in the lyric theatres of Germany for a score of years, but for the Parisians he pictured the place in which Weber's hero meets *Samiel* very graphically indeed: —

"In the heart of the Bohemian Forest, old as the world, lies the Wolf's Glen. Its legend lingered till the Thirty Years' War, which destroyed the last traces of German grandeur; but now, like many another boding memory, it has died out from the folk. Even at that time most men only knew the gulch by hearsay. They would relate how some gamekeeper, straying on indeterminable paths through wild, untrodden thickets, scarce knowing how, had come to the brink of the Wolf's Gulch. Returning, he had told of gruesome sights he had there seen, at which the hearer crossed himself and prayed the saints to shield him from ever wandering to that region. Even on his approach the keeper had heard an eerie sound; though the wind was still, a muffled moaning filled the branches of the ancient pines, which bowed their dark heads to and fro unbidden. Arrived at the verge, he had looked down into an abyss whose depths his eye could never plumb. Jagged reefs of rock stood high in shape of human limbs and terribly distorted faces. Beside them heaps of pitch-black stones in form of giant toads and lizards; they moved and crept and rolled in heavy ragged masses; but under them the ground could no more be distinguished. From thence foul vapors rose incessantly and spread a pestilential stench around. Here and there they would divide and range themselves in ranks that took the form of human beings with faces all convulsed. Upon a rotting tree-trunk in the midst of all these horrors sat an enormous owl, torpid in

its daytime roost; behind it a frowning cavern, guarded by two monsters direly blent of snake and toad and lizard. These, with all the other seeming life the chasm harbored, lay in deathlike slumber, and any movement visible was that of one plunged in deep dreams; so that the forester had dismal fears of what this odious crew might wake into at midnight.

"But still more horrible than what he saw, was what he heard. A storm that stirred nothing, and whose gusts he himself could not feel, howled over the glen, paused suddenly, as if listening to itself, and then broke out again with added fury. Atrocious cries thronged from the pit; then a flock of countless birds of prey ascended from its bowels, spread like a pitch-black pall across the gulf, and fell back again into night. The screeches sounded to the huntsman like the groans of souls condemned, and tore his heart with anguish never felt before. Never had he heard such cries, compared to which the croak of ravens was as the song of nightingales. And now again deep silence; all motion ceased; only in the depths there seemed a sluggish writhing, and the owl flapped its wings as though in a dream. The most undaunted huntsman, the best acquainted with the wood's nocturnal terrors, fled like a timid roe in speechless agony, and, heedless where his footsteps bore him, ran breathless to the nearest hut, the nearest cabin, to meet some human soul to whom to tell his horrible adventure, yet ne'er could find words in which to frame it." [1]

[1] "Richard Wagner's Prose Works," translated by William Ashton Ellis, Vol. VII, p. 169.

So much for the folklore and mythology of "Der Freischütz," the element which makes it not only a national but also the chiefest of romantic operas. We are grown careless in our use of musical terms, or else it would not be necessary to devote words to an explanation of what is meant by romantic in this case. We hear a great deal about romanticism as contradistinguished from classicism, but it is seldom that we have the line of demarcation between the two tendencies or schools drawn for us. Classical composers, I am inclined to think, are composers of the first rank who have developed music to its highest perfection on its formal side in obedience to long and widely accepted laws, preferring æsthetic beauty over emotional content, or, at any rate, refusing to sacrifice form to characteristic expression. Romantic composers would then be those who have sought their ideals in other directions and striven to give them expression irrespective of the restrictions and limitations of form — composers who, in short, prefer content to manner. In the sense of these definitions, Weber's opera is a classic work, for in it the old forms which Wagner's influence destroyed are preserved. Nevertheless, "Der Freischütz" is romantic in a very particular sense, and it is in this romanticism that its political significance to which I have referred lies. It is romantic in subject and the source of its inspiration. This source is the same to which the creators of the romantic school of literature went for its subjects — the fantastical stories of chivalry

and knighthood, of which the principal elements were the marvellous and supernatural. The literary romanticists did a great deal to encourage patriotism among the Germans in the beginning of the nineteenth century by disclosing to the German people the wealth of their legendary lore and the beauty of their folk-songs. The circumstances which established the artistic kinship between Von Weber and Wagner, to which I have alluded, was a direct fruit of this patriotism. In 1813 Von Weber went to Prague to organize a German opera. A part of the following summer he spent in Berlin. Prussia was leading Europe in the effort to throw off the yoke of Bonaparte, and the youths of the Prussian capital, especially the students, were drunken with the wine of Körner's "Lyre and Sword." While returning to Prague Von Weber stopped for a while at the castle Gräfen-Tonna, where he composed some of Körner's poems, among them "Lützow's wilde Jagd" and the "Schwertlied." These songs were soon in everybody's mouth and acted like sparks flung into the powder-magazine of national feeling. Naturally they reacted upon the composer himself, and under their influence and the spirit which they did so much to foster Weber's Germanism developed from an emotion into a religion. He worked with redoubled zeal in behalf of German opera at Prague, and when he was called to be Court Music Director in Dresden in 1817, he entered upon his duties as if consecrated to a holy task. He had found

the conditions more favorable to German opera in the Bohemian capital than in the Saxon. In Prague he had sloth and indifference to overcome; in Dresden the obstacles were hatred of Prussia, the tastes of a court and people long accustomed to Italian traditions, and the intrigues of his colleagues in the Italian opera and the church. What I wrote some eighteen years ago[1] of Weber's labors in Dresden may serve again to make plain how the militant Germanism of the composer achieved its great triumph.

The Italian régime was maintained in Dresden through the efforts of the conductor of the Italian opera, Morlacchi; the concert master, Poledro; the church composer, Schubert, and Count von Einsiedel, Cabinet Minister. The efforts of these men placed innumerable obstacles in Weber's path, and their influence heaped humiliations upon him. Confidence alone in the ultimate success of his efforts to regenerate the lyric drama sustained him in his trials. Against the merely sensuous charm of suave melody and lovely singing he opposed truthfulness of feeling and conscientious endeavor for the attainment of a perfect ensemble. Here his powers of organization, trained by his experiences in Prague, his perfect knowledge of the stage, imbibed with his mother's milk, and his unquenchable zeal, gave him amazing puissance. Thoroughness was his watchword. He put aside the old custom of conducting while seated at the pianoforte, and appeared before

[1] "Famous Composers and their Works," Vol. I, p. 396.

his players with a bâton. He was an inspiration, not a figurehead. His mind and his emotions dominated theirs, and were published in the performance. He raised the standard of the chorus, stimulated the actors, inspected the stage furnishings and costumes, and stamped harmony of feeling, harmony of understanding, and harmony of effort upon the first work undertaken — a performance of Méhul's "Joseph in Egypt." Nor did he confine his educational efforts to the people of the theatre. He continued in Dresden the plan first put into practice by him in Prague of printing articles about new operas in the newspapers to stimulate public appreciation of their characteristics and beauties. For a while the work of organization checked his creative energies, but when his duties touching new music for court or church functions gave him the opportunity, he wrote with undiminished energy.

In 1810 Apel's "Gespensterbuch" had fallen into his hands and he had marked the story of "Der Freischütz" for treatment. His mind reverted to it again in the spring of 1817. Friedrich Kind agreed to write the book, and placed it complete in his hands on March 1, nine days after he had undertaken the commission. Weber's enthusiasm was great, but circumstances prevented him from devoting much time to the composition of the opera. He wrote the first of its music in July, 1817, but did not complete it till May 13, 1820. It was in his mind during all this period, however, and would doubtless have been finished much earlier had he received an

order to write an opera from the Saxon court. In this expectation he was disappointed, and the honor of having encouraged the production of the most national opera ever written went to Berlin, where the patriotism which had been warmed by Weber's setting of Körner's songs was still ablaze, and where Count Brühl's plans were discussing to bring him to the Prussian capital as Capellmeister. The opera was given on June 18, 1821, under circumstances that produced intense excitement in the minds of Weber's friends. The sympathies of the musical areopagus of Berlin were not with Weber or his work — neither before nor after the first performance; but Weber spoke to the popular heart, and its quick, responsive throb lifted him at once to the crest of the wave which soon deluged all Germany. The overture had to be repeated to still the applause that followed its first performance, and when the curtain fell on the las scene, a new chapter in German art had been opened.[1]

[1] As I write it is nearly eighty-five years since "Der Freischütz" was first heard in New York. The place was the Park Theatre and the date March 2, 1825. The opera was only four years old at the time, and, in conformity with the custom of the period, the representation, which was in English, no doubt was a very different affair from that to which the public has become accustomed since. But it is interesting to know that there is at least one opera in the Metropolitan list which antedates the first Italian performance ever given in America. Even at that early day the scene in the Wolf's Glen created a sensation. The world over "Der Freischütz" is looked upon as peculiarly the property of the Germans, but a German performance of it was not heard in New York till 1856, when the opera was brought out under the direction of Carl Bergmann, at the old Broadway Theatre.

CHAPTER XII

"TANNHÄUSER"

NOTHING could have demonstrated more perfectly the righteousness of Wagner's claim to the title of poet than his acceptance of the Greek theory that a people's legends and myths are the fittest subjects for dramatic treatment, unless it be the manner in which he has reshaped his material in order to infuse it with that deep ethical principle to which reference has several times been made. In "The Flying Dutchman," "The Nibelung's Ring," and "Tannhäuser" the idea is practically his creation. In the last of these dramas it is evolved out of the simple episode in the parent-legend of the death of Lisaura, whose heart broke when her knight went to kiss the Queen of Love and Beauty. The dissolute knight of the old story Wagner in turn metamorphoses into a type of manhood "in its passionate desires and ideal aspirations" — the *Faust* of Goethe. All the magnificent energy of our ideal man is brought forward in the poet's conception, but it is an energy which is shattered in its fluctuation between sensual delights and ideal aspirations, respectively typified in the *Venus* and *Elizabeth* of the play. Here is the contradiction against which he was shattered as the heroes of Greek tragedy were shattered on the rock of implacable Fate. But the transcendent beauty of the modern drama is lent by the ethical idea of salvation through the love of pure woman — a salvation touching which no one can be in doubt when *Tannhäuser* sinks lifeless beside the bier of the atoning saint, and

Venus's cries of woe are swallowed up by the pious canticle of the returning pilgrims.[1]

It will be necessary in the expositions of the lyric dramas of Wagner, which I shall attempt in these chapters, to choose only such material as will serve directly to help to an understanding of them as they move by the senses in the theatre, leaving the reader to consult the commentaries, which are plentiful, for deeper study of the composer's methods and philosophical purposes. Such study is not to be despised; but, unless it be wisely conducted, it is likely to be a hindrance rather than a help to enjoyment. It is a too common error of musical amateurs to devote their attention to the forms and names of the phrases out of which Wagner constructs his musical fabric, especially that of his later dramas. This tendency has been humored, even in the case of the earlier operas, by pedants, who have given names to the themes which the composer used, though he had not yet begun to apply the system of symbolization which marks his works beginning with "Tristan und Isolde." It has been done with "Tannhäuser," though it is, to all intents and purposes, an opera of the conventional type, and not what is called a "music-drama." The reminiscent use of themes is much older than Wagner. It is well to familiarize one's

[1] "Studies in the Wagnerian Drama," by H. E. Krehbiel, pp. 35, 36.

self with the characteristic elements of a score, but, as I have urged in the book quoted above, if we confine our study of Wagner to the forms of the musical motives and the names which have arbitrarily been given to them, we shall at the last have enriched our minds with a thematic catalogue, and nothing else. It is better to know nothing about these names, and content ourselves with simple, sensuous enjoyment, than to spend our time at the theatre answering the baldest of all the riddles of Wagner's orchestra: "What am I playing now?" In the studies of Wagner's works I shall point to some of the most significant phrases in the music in connection with significant occurrences in the play, but I shall seldom, if ever, analyze the motival construction in the style of the Wolzogen handbooks.

* * *

There are texts in the prefatory excerpt for a discussion of "Tannhäuser" from all the points of view which might make such a discussion interesting and profitable. There is no doubt in my mind that it is the poet-composer's noblest tragedy and, from a literary point of view, his most artistic. It is laid out on such a broad, simple, and symmetrical plan that its dramatic contents can be set forth in a few paragraphs, and we can easily forego a detailed description of its scenes. A knightly minstrel, who has taken part in one of the tournaments of song which tradition says used to be held at the court of the Landgrave of Thuringia in the early

part of the thirteenth century, has, by his song and bearing, won the heart of *Elizabeth*, niece of the *Landgrave*. Unmindful of his great good fortune, he has found his way to the court held by the Goddess of Love within the hollow of the Hörselberg, which lies across the valley and over against the Wartburg. *Dame Venus* herself becomes enamoured of the knight, who calls himself *Tannhäuser*, and for a year and a day he remains at her side and in her arms. At length, mind and senses surfeited, a longing seizes him for the world which he has abandoned, for the refreshing sights and sounds of earth, and even for its pains. *Dame Venus* seeks to detain him, but he is resolute to leave her and her realm. Like a true knight, however, he promises to sing her praises wherever he may go; but when she offers to welcome him again if he should weary and sicken of the world and seek redemption from its hypocrisies, he replies that for him redemption rests only in the Virgin Mary. The invocation breaks the bonds of enchantment which have held him. The scenes of allurement which have so long surrounded him melt away, and he finds himself in an attitude of prayer in a blooming valley below the Wartburg. It is spring, and a shepherd lad, seated on a rock, trolls a lay to spring's goddess. A troop of pilgrims passing by on their way to Rome suggest by their canticle the need of absolution from the burden of sin which rests upon him, but before he can join them, the *Landgrave* and a hunting party come upon him. He is recognized by his erstwhile

companions in song, and consents to return to the castle on being told by one of the minstrels, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, that his song had vanquished not only them, but the heart of the saintly *Elizabeth* as well.

In the Wartburg *Tannhäuser* meets the maiden whose heart he has won just after she has apostrophized the walls which had echoed his voice; and from him she learns the meaning of the strange emotion which fills her in his presence. Again minstrels gather before a company of great nobles for a contest in the Hall of Song. Love is to be the theme, and the hand of *Elizabeth* the reward of the victor. Spiritual love is hymned by *Tannhäuser's* companions. *Wolfram von Eschenbach* likens it to a pure fountain from which only high and sacred feelings can flow. *Tannhäuser* questions the right of those who have not experienced the passion as he has felt it to define the nature of love. Goaded by the taunts and threats of rude *Biterolf*, he bursts forth in a praise of Venus. The assembly is in commotion. Swords are drawn. Sacrilege must be punished. Death confronts the impiously daring minstrel. But *Elizabeth*, whose heart has been mortally pierced by his words, interposes to save him. She has been stricken, but what is that to his danger of everlasting damnation? Would they rob his soul of its eternal welfare? The knight, indifferent to a score of swords, is crushed by such unselfish devotion, and humbly accepts the *Landgrave's* clemency, which spares his life that he may

join a younger band of pilgrims and seek absolution at Rome. He goes to the Holy City, mortifying his flesh at every step, and humbles himself in self-abasement and accusation before the Pope; but only to hear from the hard lips of the Keeper of the Keys that for such sin as his there is as little hope of deliverance as for the rebudding of the papal staff.

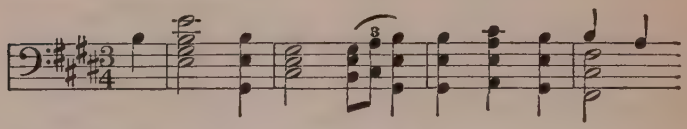
The elder pilgrims return in the fall of the year, and *Elizabeth* eagerly seeks among them for the face of the knight whose soul and body she had tried to save. He is not among them. Gently she puts aside the proffered help of *Wolfram*, whose unselfish love is ever with her, climbs the hill to the castle, and dies. Famished and footsore, *Tannhäuser* staggers after the band of pilgrims who have returned to their homes with sins forgiven. His greeting of *Wolfram* is harsh, but the good minstrel's sympathy constrains him to tell the story of his vain pilgrimage. Salvation forfeited, naught is left for him but to seek surcease of suffering in the arms of *Venus*. Again he sees her grotto streaming with roseate light and hears her alluring voice. He rushes forward toward the scene of enchantment, but *Wolfram* utters again the name of her who is now pleading for him before the judgment seat of God Himself; and he reels back. A funeral cortège descends from the castle. With an agonized cry: "Holy *Elizabeth*, pray for me!" *Tannhäuser* sinks lifeless beside the bier just as the band of younger pilgrims comes from Rome bearing the

crozier of the Pope clothed in fresh verdure. They hymn the miracle of redemption.

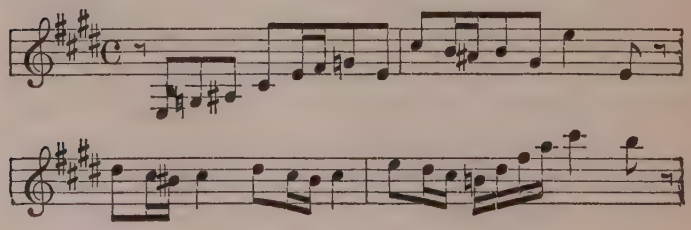
* * *

Wagner has himself told us what fancies he is willing shall flit through the minds of listeners to the overture to his opera. It was performed at a concert under his direction while he was a political refugee at Zurich, and for the programme of the concert he wrote a synopsis of its musical and poetical contents which I shall give here in the translation made by William Ashton Ellis, but with the beginnings of the themes which are referred to reproduced in musical notes: —

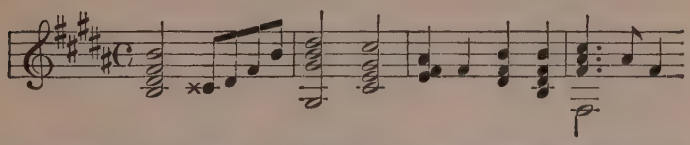
To begin with, the orchestra leads before us the pilgrims' chant alone: —



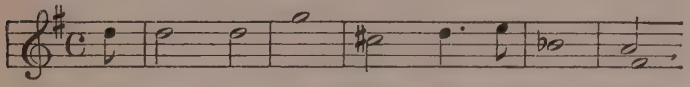
it draws near, then swells into a mighty outpour and passes, finally, away. Evenfall; last echo of the chant. As night breaks, magic sights and sounds appear, the whirlings of a fearsomely voluptuous dance are seen: —



These are the Venusberg's seductive spells that show themselves at dead of night to those whose breasts are fired by daring of the senses. Attracted by the tempting show, a shapely human form draws nigh; 'tis *Tannhäuser*, love's minstrel. He sounds his jubilant song of love



in joyous challenge, as though to force the wanton witchery to do his bidding. Wild cries of riot answer him; the rosy cloud grows denser round him; entrancing perfumes hem him in and steal away his senses. In the most seductive of half-lights his wonder-seeing eye beholds a female form indicible; he hears a voice that sweetly murmurs out the siren call, which promises contentment of the darer's wildest wishes:—



Venus herself it is, this woman who appears to him. Then the heart and senses burn within him; a fierce, devouring passion fires the blood in all his veins; with irresistible constraint it thrusts him nearer; before the goddess's self he steps with that canticle of love triumphant, and now he sings it in ecstatic praise of her. As though at wizard spell of his, the wonders of the Venusberg unroll their brightest fill before him; tumultuous shouts and savage cries of joy mount up on every hand; in drunken glee bacchantes drive their raging dance and drag *Tannhäuser* to the warm caresses of love's goddess, who throws her glowing arms around the mortal, drowned with bliss, and bears him where no step dare tread, to the realm of Being-no-more.

A scurry, like the sound of the wild hunt, and speedily the storm is laid. Merely a wanton whir still pulses in the breeze, a wave of weird voluptuousness, like the sensuous breath of unblest love, still soughs above the spot where impious charms had shed their raptures and over which the night now broods once more. But dawn begins to break; already from afar is heard again the pilgrims' chant. As this chant draws closer and closer, as the day drives farther back the night, that whir and soughing of the air — which had erewhile sounded like the eerie cry of souls condemned — now rises to ever gladder waves, so that when the sun ascends at last in splendor and the pilgrims' chant proclaims in ecstasy to all the world, to all that live and move thereon, salvation won, this wave itself swells out the tidings of sublimest joy. 'Tis the carol of the Venusberg itself redeemed from curse of impiousness, this cry we hear amid the hymn of God. So wells and leaps each pulse of life in chorus of redemption, and both dissevered elements, both soul and senses, God and nature, unite in the atoning kiss of hallowed love.

This description of the poetical contents of the overture to "Tannhäuser" applies to the ordinary form of the introduction to the opera which was used (and still is in many cases) until Wagner revised the opera for performance in Paris in 1861. The traditions of French opera called for a ballet in the third act. Wagner was willing to yield to the desire for a ballet, but he could not place it where the habits of the opera-going public demanded it. Instead, he remodelled the overture and, sacrificing the *coda* which brought back a return of the canticle of the pilgrims, he lengthened the middle portion to fit an extended choreographic scene, and

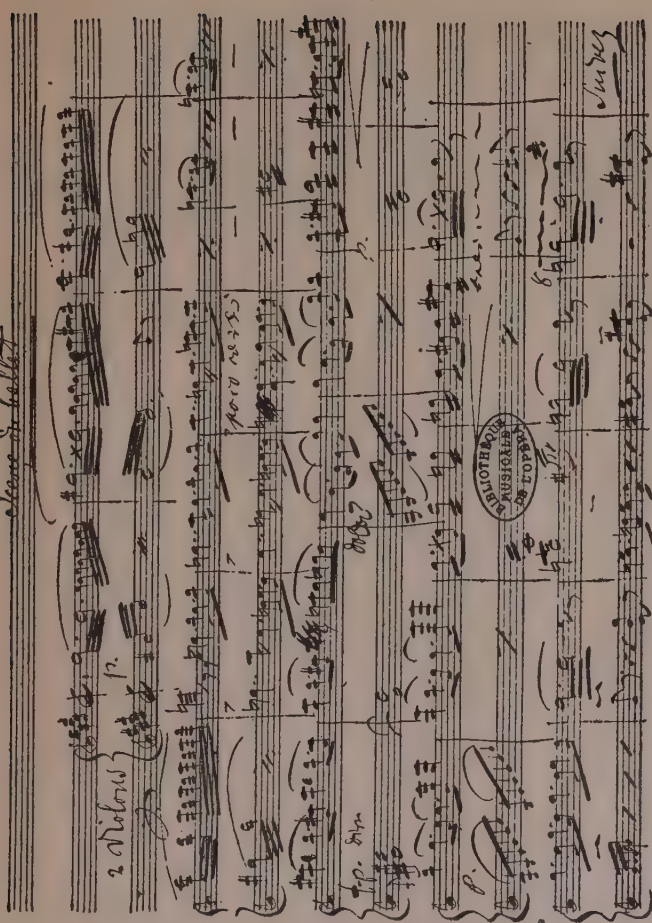
with it led into the opera without a break. The neglect to provide a ballet in the usual place led to a tremendous disturbance in which the Jockey Club took the lead. Wagner's purpose in the extended portion of the overture now called the "Bacchanale" may be read in his stage-directions for the scene.

The scene represents the interior of the Venusberg (Hörselberg), in the neighborhood of Eisenach. A large cave seems to extend to an invisible distance at a turn to the right. From a cleft through which the pale light of day penetrates, a green waterfall tumbles foaming over rocks the entire length of the cave. From the basin which receives the water, a brook flows toward the background, where it spreads out into a lake, in which naiads are seen bathing and on the banks of which sirens are reclining. On both sides of the grotto are rocky projections of irregular form, overgrown with singular, coral-like tropical plants. Before an opening extending upward on the left, from which a rosy twilight enters, *Venus* lies upon a rich couch; before her, his head upon her lap, his harp by his side, half kneeling, reclines *Tannhäuser*. Surrounding the couch in fascinating embrace are the *Three Graces;* beside and behind the couch innumerable sleeping amorettes, in attitudes of wild disorder, like children who had fallen asleep wearied with the exertions of a struggle. The entire foreground is illumined by a magical, ruddy light shining upward from below, through which the emerald green of the waterfall, with its white foam, penetrates. The distant background, with the shores of the lake, seems transfigured by a sort of moonlight. When the curtain rises, youths, reclining on the rocky projections, answering the beckonings of the nymphs, hurry down to them; beside the basin of the waterfall the nymphs have begun the dance designed to lure the

youths to them. They pair off; flight and chase enliven the dance.

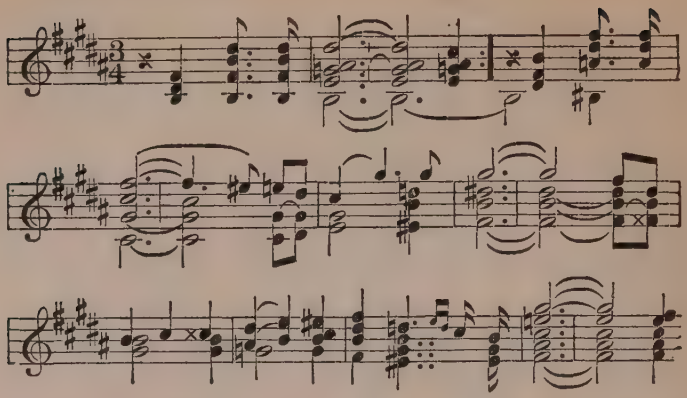
From the distant background a procession of bacchantes approach, rushing through the rows of the loving couples and stimulating them to wilder pleasures. With gestures of enthusiastic intoxication they tempt the lovers to growing recklessness. Satyrs and fauns have appeared from the cleft of the rocks and, dancing the while, force their way between the bacchantes and lovers, increasing the disorder by chasing the nymphs. The tumult reaches its height, whereupon the *Graces* rise in horror and seek to put a stop to the wild conduct of the dancing rout and drive the mad roisterers from the scene. Fearful that they themselves might be drawn into the whirlpool, they turn to the sleeping amorettes and drive them aloft. They flutter about, then gather into ranks on high, filling the upper spaces of the cave, whence they send down a hail of arrows upon the wild revellers. These, wounded by the arrows, filled with a mighty love-longing, cease their dance and sink down exhausted. The *Graces* capture the wounded and seek, while separating the intoxicated ones into pairs, to scatter them in the background. Then, still pursued by the flying amorettes, the bacchantes, fauns, satyrs, nymphs, and youths depart in various directions. A rosy mist, growing more and more dense, sinks down, hiding first the amorettes and then the entire background, so that finally only *Venus*, *Tannhäuser*, and the *Graces* remain visible. The *Graces* now turn their faces to the foreground; gracefully intertwined, they approach *Venus*, seemingly informing her of the victory they have won over the mad passions of her subjects.

The dense mist in the background is dissipated, and a tableau, a cloud picture, shows the rape of Europa, who, sitting on the back of a bull decorated with flowers and led by tritons and nereids, sails across the blue lake.



Fac-simile of Wagner's Autograph of a Page of the Bacchanale in "Tannhäuser," arranged for Two Violins for the Ballet Master at the Paris Grand Opéra.

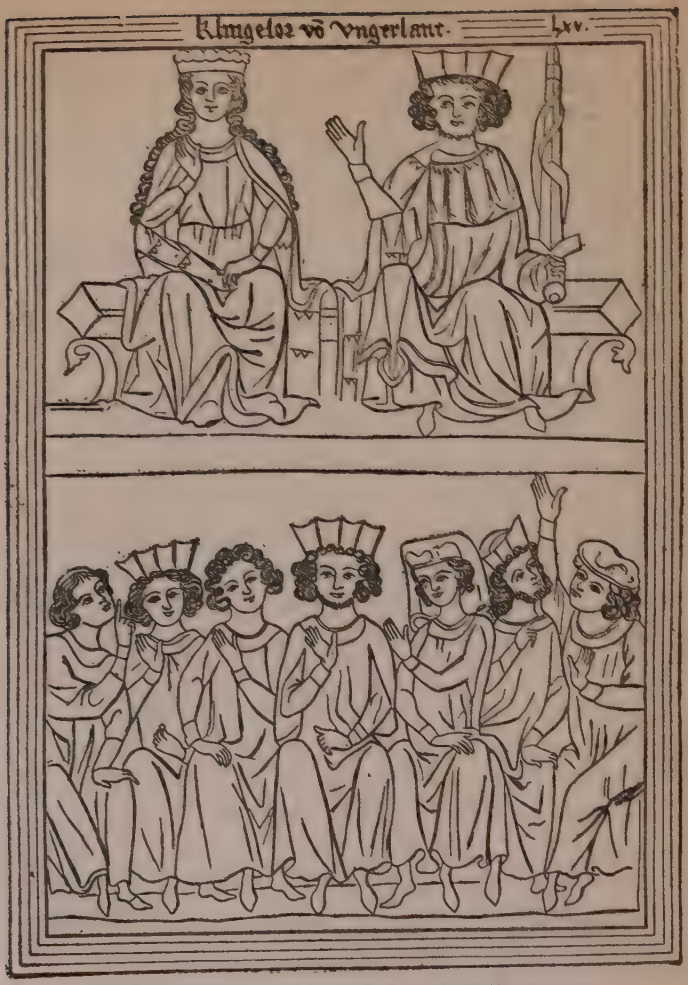
Song of the Sirens:—



The rosy mist shuts down, the picture disappears, and the *Graces* suggest by an ingratiating dance the secret significance that it was an achievement of love. Again the mists move about. In the pale moonlight Leda is discovered reclining by the side of the forest lake; the swan swims toward her and caressingly lays his head upon her breast. Gradually this picture also disappears and, the mist blown away, discloses the grotto deserted and silent. The *Graces* courtesy mischievously to *Venus* and slowly leave the grotto of love. Deepest silence. (The duet between *Venus* and *Tannhäuser* begins.)

The work which Wagner accomplished in behalf of the legend of Tannhäuser is fairly comparable with the tales which have been woven around the figure of King Arthur. The stories of the Knights of the Round Table are in the mouths of all English-speaking peoples because of the "Idylls of the King"; the legend of Tannhäuser was saved from becoming the exclusive property of German literary students

by Wagner's opera. Like many folk-tales, the story touches historical circumstance in part, and for the rest reaches far into the shadowy realm of legendary lore. The historical element is compassed by the fact that the principal human characters involved in it once had existence. There was a Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia whose court was held in the Wartburg — that noble castle which in a later century gave shelter to Martin Luther while he endowed the German people with a reformed religion, their version of the Bible and a literary language. The minstrel knights, which in the opera meet in a contest of song, also belong to history. Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote the version of the Quest of the Holy Grail which inspired Wagner's "Parsifal" and which is morally the most exalted epical form which that legend ever received. His companions also existed. Tannhäuser is not an invention, though it is to Wagner alone that we owe his association with the famous contest of minstrelsy which is the middle picture in Wagner's drama. Of the veritable Tannhäuser, we know extremely little. He was a knight and minstrel at the court of Duke Frederick II of Austria in the first decades of the thirteenth century, who, it is said, led a dissolute life, squandered his fortune, and wrecked his health, but did timely penance at the end and failed not of the consolations of Holy Church. After he had lost his estate near Vienna he found protection with Otto II of Bavaria, who was Stadtholder of Austria from A.D. 1246 till his death in



THE CONTEST OF MINSTRELS IN THE WARTBURG
(From the Manessian Ms. in Heidelberg)

(Above, from left to right: Landgravine Sophia and Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia.

Below: Herr Biterolf, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, Klingesor von Ungarland, Reinmar der Alte, Walther von der Vogelweide, Heinrich von Rispach.)

1253. He sang the praises of Otto's son-in-law, Conrad IV, who was father of Conradin, the last heir of the Hohenstaufens. Tannhäuser was therefore a Ghibelline, as was plainly the folk-poet who made him the hero of the ballad which tells of his adventure with Venus. Tannhäuser's extant poems, when not in praise of princes, are gay in character, with the exception of a penitential hymn — a circumstance which may have had some weight with the ballad-makers. There is a picture labelled with his name in a famous collection of minnesongs called the Manessian Manuscript, which shows him with the Crusaders' cross upon his cloak. This may be looked upon as evidence that he took part in one of the crusades, probably that of A.D. 1228. There is no evidence that the contest of minstrelsy at the Wartburg ever took place. It seems to have been an invention of mediæval poets. The Manessian Manuscript is embellished with a picture of the principal personages connected with the story. They are Landgrave Hermann, the Landgravine Sophia, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Reinmar der Alte, Heinrich von Rispach, Biterolf, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, and Klingesor. The subject discussed by the minstrels was scholastic, and Ofterdingen, to save his life, sought help of Klingesor, who was a magician and the reputed nephew of Virgilius of Naples; and the Landgravine threw her cloak around him when he was hardest pressed. This incident, its ethical significance marvellously enhanced, is the culmination of Wagner's second act.

Instead of the historical Sophia, however, we have in the opera Hermann's niece, Elizabeth, a creation of the poet's, though modelled apparently after the sainted Elizabeth of Hungary, who, however, had scarcely opened her eyes upon the world in the Wartburg at the date ascribed to the contest, *i.e.* A.D. 1206. Wagner has given the rôle played by Heinrich von Ofterdingen (also Effterdingen) to Tannhäuser apparently on the strength of an essay which appeared about the time that he took up the study of the mediæval legends of Germany, which identified the two men. Ofterdingen himself is now thought to be a creation of some poet's fancy; but the large part devoted to his adventure in the old poem which tells of the contest of minstrelsy led the mediæval poets to attribute many great literary deeds to him, one of them nothing less than the authorship of the "Nibelungenlied."

Wagner seems to have been under the impression that there was an old book of folk-tales (a so-called *Volksbuch*) devoted to the story of Tannhäuser and his adventure with Dame Venus. This is a mistake. The legend came down to modern times by way of popular ballads. One of these, which was printed by Uhland, consists largely of the dialogue between Tannhäuser and his enslaver, as does also the carnival play which Hans Sachs wrote on the subject. The writer of the ballad was so energetic an enemy of the Papal power that he condemns Urban IV to eternal torment because of his severe judgment of the penitent sinner:—

Do was er widrumb in den berg
und het sein lieb erkoren,
des muoss der vierde babst Urban
auch ewig sein verloren.

A ballad which was sung in one Swiss district as late as the third decade of the nineteenth century gives the story of the knight and his temptress in fuller detail, though it knows as little of the episode of Elizabeth's love as it does of the tournament of song. In this ballad Tannhäuser (or "Tanhuser") is a goodly knight who goes out into the forest to seek adventures, or "see wonders." He finds a party of maidens engaged in a bewildering dance, and tarries to enjoy the spectacle. Frau Frene, or, as we would write it now, Freya (the Norse Venus whose memory we perpetuate in our Friday), seeks to persuade him to remain with her, promising to give him her youngest daughter to wife. The knight remains, but will not mate with the maiden, for he has seen the devil lurking in her brown eyes and learned that once in her toils he will be lost forever. Lying under Frau Frene's fig tree, at length, he dreams that he must quit his sinful life. He tears himself loose from the enchantment and journeys to Rome, where he falls at the feet of the Pope and asks absolution. The Pope holds in his hand a staff so dry that it has split. "Your sins are as little likely to be forgiven as this staff is to green," is his harsh judgment. Tannhäuser kneels before the altar, extends his arms, and asks mercy of Christ; then leaves the church in

despair and is lost to view. On the third day after this the Pope's staff is found to be covered with fresh leaves. He sends out messengers to find Tannhäuser, but he has returned to Frau Frene. Then comes the moral of the tale expressed with a naïve forcefulness to which a translation cannot do justice: —

> Drum soll kein Pfaff, kein Kardinal,
> Kein Sünder nie verdammen;
> Der Sünder mag sein so gross er will,
> Kann Gottes Gnad erlangen.

Two other sources supplied Wagner with material for as many effective scenes in his drama. From E. T. A. Hofmann's "Der Kampf der Sänger" he got the second scene of the first act, the hunt and the gathering in the valley below Wartburg; from Ludwig Tieck's "Der getreue Eckhart und der Tannhäuser" the narrative of the minstrel's pilgrimage to Rome.

Students of comparative mythology and folklore will have no difficulty in seeing in the legend of Tannhäuser one of the many tales of the association during a period of enchantment of men and elves. Parallels between the theatre and apparatus of these tales extend back into remote antiquity. The grotto of Venus, in which Tannhäuser steeps himself with sensuality, is but a German variant of the Garden of Delight, in which the heroes of antiquity met their fair enslavers. It is Ogygia, the Delightful Island, where Ulysses met Calypso. It is that Avalon in which King Arthur was healed

of his wounds by his fairy sister Morgain. The crozier which bursts into green in token of Tannhäuser's forgiveness has prototypes in the lances which, when planted in the ground by Charlemagne's warriors, were transformed overnight into a leafy forest; in the javelins of Polydore, of which Virgil tells us in the "Æneid"; in the staff of St. Christopher, which grew into a tree after he had carried the Christ Child across the river; in the staff which put on leaves in the hands of Joseph, wherefore the Virgin Mary gave him her hand in marriage; in the rod of Aaron, which, when laid up among others in the tabernacle, "brought forth buds and bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds."

There are many parallels in classic story and folklore of the incident of Tannhäuser's sojourn with Venus. I mention but a few. There are the episodes of Ulysses and Calypso, Ulysses and Circe, Numa and Egeria, Rinaldo and Armida, Prince Ahmed and Peri Banou. Less familiar are the folktales which Mr. Baring-Gould has collected of Helgi's life with the troll Ingibjorg, a Norse story; of James Soideman of Serraade, "who was kept by the spirits in a mountain during the space of seven years, and at length came out, but lived afterwards in great distress and fear lest they should again take him away"; of the young Swede lured away by an elfin woman from the side of his bride into a mountain, where he abode with the siren forty years and thought it but an hour.

There are many Caves of Venus in Europe, but

none around which there clusters such a wealth of legend as around the grotto in the Hörselberg. Nineteen years ago the writer of this book visited the scene and explored the cave. He found it a decidedly commonplace hole in the ground, but was richly rewarded by the results of the literary explorations to which the visit led him. Before Christianity came to reconstruct the folk-tales of the Thuringian peasants, the Hörselberg was the home of Dame Holda, or Holle, and the horde of weird creatures which used to go tearing through the German forests on a wild rout in the Yuletide. Dame Holle, like many another character in Teutonic mythology, was a benignant creature, whose blessing brought forth fruitfulness to fields and vineyards, before the Christian priests metamorphosed her into a thing wholly of evil. She was the mother of all the fays and fairies that followed in the train of the Wild Huntsman, and though she appeared at times as a seductive siren and tempted men to their destruction, she appeared oftener as an old woman who rewarded acts of kindness with endless generosity. It was she who had in keeping the souls of unborn children, and babes who died before they could be christened were carried by her to the Jordan and baptized in its waters. Even after priestly sermons had transformed her into a beauteous she-devil, she still kept up her residence in the cave, which now, in turn, took on a new character. Venturesome persons who got near its mouth, either purposely or by accident, told of strange noises which issued from it, like the

rushing of many waters or the voice of a subterranean storm. The priests supplied explanation and etymology to fit the new state of things. The noise was the lamentation of souls in the fires of purgatory, to which place of torment the cave was an opening. This was said to account for the old German name of the mountain — "Hör-Seel-Berg" — that is, "Hear-Souls-Mountain." To this Latin writers added another, viz. "Mons Horrisonus" — "the Mountain of Horrible Sounds." The forbidding appearance of the exterior — in which some fantastic writers avowed they saw a resemblance to a coffin — was no check on the fancy of the mediæval story-teller, however, who pictured the interior of the mountain as a marvellous palace, and filled it with glittering jewels and treasures incalculable. The story of Tannhäuser's sojourn within this magical cavern is only one of many, nor do they all end like that of the minstrel knight. Undeterred by the awful tales told by monks and priests, poets and romancers sang the glories and the pleasures of the cave as well as its gruesome punishments. From them we know many things concerning the appearance of the interior, the cave's inhabitants, and their merrymakings. I cannot resist the temptation to retell one of these old tales.

Adelbert, Knight of Thuringia, was one of those who experienced the delights of the Cave of Venus, yet, unlike Tannhäuser in the original legend, was saved at the last. He met Faithful Eckhart at the mouth of the cave, who warned him not to enter,

but entrancing music sounded within and he was powerless to resist. He entered. Three maidens came forward to meet him. They were airily clad, flowers were twisted in their brown locks, and they waved branches before them as they smiled and beckoned and sang a song of spring's awakening. What could Sir Adelbert do but follow when they glanced coyly over their white shoulders and led the way through a narrow passage into a garden surrounded with rose-bushes in bloom, and filled with golden-haired maidens, lovelier than the flowers, who wandered about hand in hand and sang with sirens' voices? In the middle of the rose-hedged garden stood a red gate, which bore in bold letters this legend: —

HERE DAME VENUS HOLDS COURT

The gate-keeper was the fairest of the maidens, and her fingers were busy weaving a garland of roses, but she stopped her work long enough to smile a welcome to Sir Adelbert. He thanked her gallantly and queried: Was the pretty sight a May Day celebration? Replied the winsome gate-keeper: "Here Dame Venus holds court in honor of the noble knight Sir Tannhäuser"; and she opened the gate and Adelbert entered. Within he beheld a gay tent pitched in a grove of flowering shrubs, and out of it emerged a beauteous creature and advanced toward him. Her robe was rose color, adorned with strings of pearls and festooned with fragrant

blossoms. A crown which glistened with gems rested lightly on her head. In her right hand — a dainty hand — she carried a tiny kerchief of filmy white stuff embroidered with gold, and in her left a lute. She sate herself down on a golden chair, bent her head over her left shoulder. A dreamy, tender light came into her eyes, and her rosy fingers sought the strings of her lute — strings of gold. Would she sing? Just then one of the maidens approached her, lisped musically into her ear, and pointed to the approaching knight. Almost imperceptibly, but oh, so graciously, the lips of the vision moved. As if in obedience to a command, the maiden approached, and said in rhythmical cadence: "Greetings, Sir Knight, from Dame Venus, who sends you message that all who love gaming and fair women are welcome at her court." She gave him her hand to escort him, and when the knight pressed her fingers in gratitude he felt a gentle pressure in return. The knight approached the dazzling queen of the palace and fell upon his knee; but she gave him her hand and she bade him arise, which he did after he had kissed her fingers. And she called to a maiden, who fetched a golden horn filled to the brim with wine and handed it to the knight. "Empty the goblet, like a true knight, to the health of all fair women who love and are beloved," said the queen. Sir Adelbert smiled obedience: "To love, fair lady," he said and drank the wine at a draught. And thus he became a captive and a slave.

Long did he sojourn within the magic realm, in loving dalliance with Venus and her maidens, until one day a hermit entered the cave in the absence of the queen and bore him back to the outer world, where penance and deeds of piety restored him to moral health and saved him from the fate of Tannhäuser.

CHAPTER XIII

"TRISTAN UND ISOLDE"

A VASSAL is sent to woo a beauteous princess for his lord. While he is bringing her home the two, by accident, drink a love potion, and ever thereafter their hearts are fettered together. In the midday of delirious joy, in the midnight of deepest woe, their thoughts are only of each other, for each other. Meanwhile the princess has become the vassal's queen. Then the wicked love of the pair is discovered, and the knight is obliged to seek safety in a foreign land. There (strange note this to our ears) he marries another princess whose name is like that of his love, save for the addition With the White Hand; but when wounded unto death he sends across the water for her who is still his true love, that she come and be his healer. The ship which is sent to bring her is to bear white sails on its return if successful in the mission; black, if not. Day after day the knight waits for the coming of his love while the lamp of his life burns lower and lower. At length the sails of the ship appear on the distant horizon. The knight is now himself too weak to look. "White or black?" he asks of his wife. "Black," replies she, jealousy prompting the falsehood; and the knight's heart-strings snap in twain just as his love steps over the threshold of his chamber. Oh, the pity of it! for with the lady is her lord, who, having learned the story of the fateful potion, has come to unite the lovers. Then the queen, too, dies, and the remorseful king buries the lovers in a common grave, from whose caressing sod

spring a rose-bush and a vine and intertwine so curiously that none may separate them.[1]

Upon the ancient legend which has thus been outlined Wagner reared his great tragedy entitled "Tristan und Isolde." Whence the story came nobody can tell. It is a part of the great treasure preserved from remotest antiquity by itinerant singers and story-tellers, and committed to writing by poets of the Middle Ages. The first of these, so far as unquestioned evidence goes, were French trouvères. From them the tale passed into the hands of the German minnesinger. The greatest of these who treated it was Gottfried von Strasburg (*circa* A.D. 1210), who, however, left the tale unfinished. His continuators were Ulrich von Türnheim and Heinrich von Freiberg, whose denouement (not, however, original with them) was followed by Hermann Kurtz when he published a version of Gottfried's poem in modern German in 1844. This, unquestionably, was the version which fell into Wagner's hands when, in the Dresden period (1843–1849) he devoted himself assiduously to the study of Teutonic legend and mythology. In English the romance has an equally honorable literary record. In 1804 Sir Walter Scott edited a metrical version which he fondly believed to be the work of the somewhat mythical Thomas the Rhymer and to afford evidence that the oldest literary form of the legend was British. The adventures of Tristram of

[1] "Studies in the Wagnerian Drama," by H. E. Krehbiel.

Lyonesse (who is the *Tristan* of Wagner's tragedy) form a large portion of Sir Thomas Malory's thrice glorious "Morte d'Arthur." Of modern poets Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, and Swinburne have sung the passion of the ill-starred lovers.

Elements of the legend can be traced back to the ancient literatures of the Aryan peoples. The courtship by proxy has a prototype in Norse mythology in Skirnir's wooing of Gerd for Van Frey. The incident of the sails belongs to Greek story — the legend of Ægeus and Theseus; the magic potion may be found in ancient Persian romance; the interlocked rose-tree and vine over the grave of the lovers is an example of those floral auguries and testimonies which I have mentioned in connection with the legend of Tannhäuser and the blossoming staff: in token of their innocence flowers spring miraculously from the graves of persons wrongly done to death.

A legend which lives to be retold often is like a mirror which reflects not only the original picture, but also the social and moral surroundings of different relators. So this ancient tale has been varied by the poets who have told it; and of these variants the most significant are those made by Wagner. If the ethical scheme of the poet-composer is to be observed, the chief of these must be kept in mind. In the poems of Gottfried, Arnold, and Swinburne the love potion is drunk accidentally and the passion which leads to the destruction of the lovers is a thing for which they are in nowise

responsible. Wagner puts antecedent and conscious guilt at the door of both of his heroic characters; they love each other before the dreadful drinking and do not pay the deference to the passion which in the highest conception it demands. *Tristan* is carried away by love of power and glory before man and *Isolde* is at heart a murderer and suicide. The potion is less the creator of an uncontrollable passion than it is an agency which makes the lovers forget honor, duty, and respect for the laws of society. Tennyson omits all mention of the potion and permits us to imagine *Tristram* and *Iseult* as a couple of ordinary sinners. Swinburne and Arnold follow the old story touching the hero's life in Brittany with the second *Iseult* (she of the White Hand); but while Swinburne preserves her a "maiden wife," Arnold gives her a family of children. Wagner ennobles his hero by omitting the second *Isolde*, thus bringing the story into greater sympathy with modern ideas of love and exalting the passion of the lovers.

The purpose to write a Tristan drama was in Wagner's mind three years before he began its execution. While living in Zurich, in 1854, he had advanced as far as the second act of his "Siegfried" when, in a moment of discouragement, he wrote to Liszt: "As I have never in my life enjoyed the true felicity of love, I shall erect to this most beautiful of my dreams" (*i.e.* the drama on which he was working) "a monument in which, from beginning to end, this love shall find fullest gratification.

I have sketched in my head a 'Tristan und Isolde,' the simplest of musical conceptions, but full-blooded; with the 'black flag' which waves at the end I shall then cover myself — to die." Three years later he took up the project, but under an inspiration vastly different from that notified to Liszt. The tragedy was not to be a monument to a mere dream of felicity or to his artistic despair, but a tribute to a consuming passion for Mathilde Wesendonck, wife of a benefactor who had given him an idyllic home at Triebschen, on the Lake of Lucerne. Mme. Wesendonck was the author of the two poems "Im Treibhaus" and "Träume," which, with three others from the same pen, Wagner set to music. The first four were published in the winter of 1857–1858; the last, "Im Treibhaus," on May 1, 1858. The musical theme of "Träume" was the germ of the love-music in the second act of "Tristan und Isolde"; out of "Im Treibhaus" grew some of the introduction to the third act. The tragedy was outlined in prose in August, 1857, and the versification was finished by September 18. The music was complete by July 16, 1859. Wagner gave the pencil sketches of the score to Mme. Wesendonck, who piously went over them with ink so that they might be preserved for posterity.

In 1857 Wagner had been eight years an exile from his native land. Years had passed since he began work on "Der Ring des Nibelungen," and there seemed to him little prospect of that work receiving either publication or performance. In

May of that year he received an invitation from Dom Pedro, Emperor of Brazil, to write an opera for Rio de Janeiro and direct its production. Two and a half years before he had seriously considered the project of coming to America for a concert tour; so the invitation did not strike him as so strange and extraordinary as it might have appeared to a musician of less worldly wisdom. It is not likely that he took it seriously into consideration, but at any rate it turned his thoughts again to the opera which he had mentioned to Liszt. With it he saw an opportunity for again establishing a connection with the theatre. Dom Pedro wanted, of course, an Italian opera. Wagner's plan contemplated the writing of "Tristan und Isolde" in German, its translation into Italian, the dedication of its score to the Emperor of Brazil, with the privilege of its performance there and a utilization of the opportunity, if possible, to secure a production beforehand of "Tannhäuser." Meanwhile, he would have the drama produced in its original tongue at Strasburg, then a French city conveniently near the German border, with Albert Niemann in the titular rôle and an orchestra from Karlsruhe, or some other German city which had an opera-house. He communicated the plan to Liszt, who approved of the project heartily, though he was greatly amazed at the intelligence which he had from another source that Wagner intended to write the music with an eye to a performance in Italian. "How in the name of all the gods are you going to make of it

an opera for Italian singers, as B. tells me you are? Well, since the incredible and impossible have become your elements, perhaps you will achieve this, too," Liszt wrote to him, and promised to go to Strasburg with a Wagnerian coterie to act as a guard of honor for the composer. Nothing came of either plan. Inspired by his love for Mathilde Wesendonck, Wagner wrote the opera and succeeded in selling the score to Breitkopf & Härtel for the equivalent of $800. Then began the hunt for a theatre in which to give the first representation. Eduard Devrient urged Karlsruhe, where he was director, but Wagner wanted to supervise the production, and this was impossible in a theatre of Germany so long as the decree of banishment for participation in the Saxon rebellion hung over his head. The Grand Duke of Baden appealed to the King of Saxony to recall the decree, but in vain. Wagner went to Paris and Brussels, but had to content himself with giving concerts. Weimar, Prague, and Hanover were considered in order, and at length Wagner turned to Vienna. There the opera was accepted for representation at the Court Opera, but after fifty-four rehearsals between November, 1862, and March, 1863, it was abandoned as "impossible."

The next year saw the turning-point in Wagner's career. Ludwig of Bavaria invited him to come to Munich, the political ban was removed, and "Tristan und Isolde" had its first performance, to the joy of the composer and a host of his friends, on June 10,

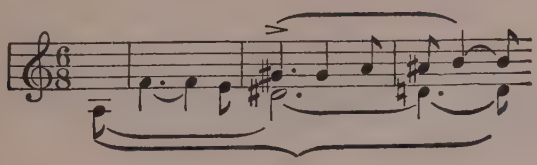
1865, at the Royal Court Theatre of the Bavarian capital, under the direction of Hans von Bülow. The rôles of *Tristan* and *Isolde* were in the hands of Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld and his wife. Albert Niemann was prevented by the failure of the Strasburg plan from being the first representative of the hero, but to him fell the honor of setting the model for all American representations. The first performance in the United States took place in the Metropolitan Opera-house on December 1, 1886, under the direction of Anton Seidl. The cast was as follows: *Isolde*, Lilli Lehmann; *Brangäne*, Marianne Brandt; *Tristan*, Albert Niemann; *Kurwenal*, Adolf Robinson; *König Marke*, Emil Fischer; *Melot*, Rudolph von Milde; *ein Hirt*, Otto Kemlitz; *ein Steuermann*, Emil Saenger; *ein Seemann*, Max Alvary.

Two circumstances bid us look a little carefully into the instrumental prelude with which Wagner has prefaced his drama. One is that it has taken so prominent a place in the concert-room that even those whose love for pure music has made them indifferent to the mixed art-form called the opera ought to desire acquaintance with its poetical and musical contents; the other is that the prelude, like the overture to "Fidelio" known as "Leonore No. 3," presents the spiritual progress of the tragedy from beginning to end to the quickened heart and mind of the listener freed from all material integument. To do this it makes use of the themes which are most significant in the development of the

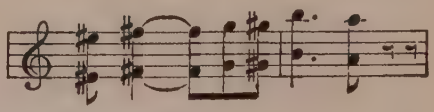
psychology of the drama, which is far and away its most important element, for the pictures are not many, and the visible action is slight. Listening to the music without thought of the drama, and, therefore, with no purpose of associating it with the specific conceptions which later have exposition in the text, we can hear in this prelude an expression of an ardent longing, a consuming hunger,

> which doth make
> The meat it feeds on,

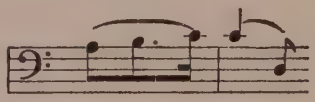
a desire that cannot be quenched, yet will not despair. Then, at the lowest ebb of the sweet agony, an ecstasy of hope, a wildly blissful contemplation of a promise of reward. If I depart here for a brief space from my announced purpose not to analyze the music in the manner of the Wagnerian commentators, it will be only because the themes of the prelude are the most pregnant of those employed in the working out of the drama, because their specific significance in the purpose of the composer is plainly set forth by their association with scenes and words, and because they are most admirably fitted by structure and emotional content to express the things attributed to them. The most important of the themes is that with which the prelude begins: —



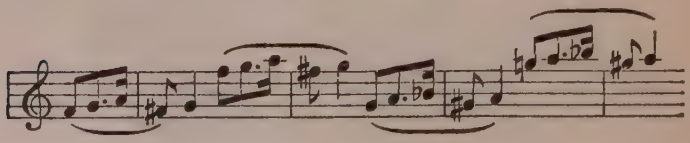
Note that it is two-voiced and that one voice ascends chromatically (that is, in half steps), and the other descends in the same manner. In the aspiring voice there is an expression of longing; in the descending, of suffering and dejection. We therefore may look upon it as a symbol of the lovers and their passion in a dual aspect. After an exposition of this theme there enters another: —



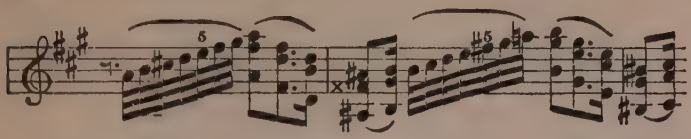
followed immediately by: —



In the play the first of these two is associated with the character of the hero; the second with the glance which *Tristan* cast upon *Isolde* when she was about to kill him — the glance which inspired the love of the princess. Two modifications of the principal theme provide nearly all the rest of the material used in the building up of the prelude. The first is a diminution of the *motif* compassed by the second and third measures, which by reiteration develops the climax of the piece: —



The second is a harmonized inversion of the same short figure, preceded by a jubilantly ascending scale: —

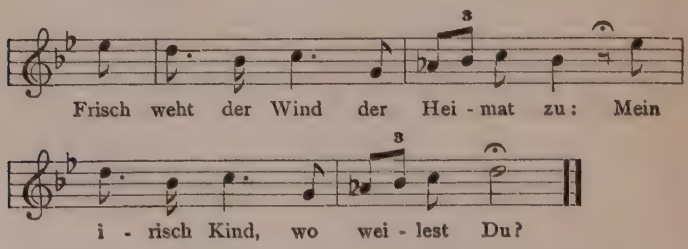


This is the expression of the ecstasy of hope, the wildly blissful contemplation of a promise of reward of which I have spoken. Wagner tells us what the thing hoped for, the joy contemplated in expectation, is, not only in the drama, but also in an exposition of the contents of the prelude made for concert purposes. He deserves that it shall be known, and I reproduce it in the translation of William Ashton Ellis. After rehearsing the legend down to the drinking of the fateful philtre, he says: —

The musician who chose this theme for the prelude to his love drama, as he felt that he was now in the boundless realm of the very element of music, could only have one care: how he should set bounds to his fancy, for the exhaustion of the theme was impossible. Thus he took, once for all, this insatiable desire. In long-drawn accents it surges up, from its first timid confession, its softest attraction, through sobbing sighs, hope and pain, laments and wishes, delight and torment, up to the mightiest onslaught, the most powerful endeavor to find the breach which shall open to the heart the path to the ocean of the endless joy of love. In vain! Its power spent, the heart sinks back to thirst with desire, with desire unfulfilled, as each fruition only brings forth seeds of fresh desire,

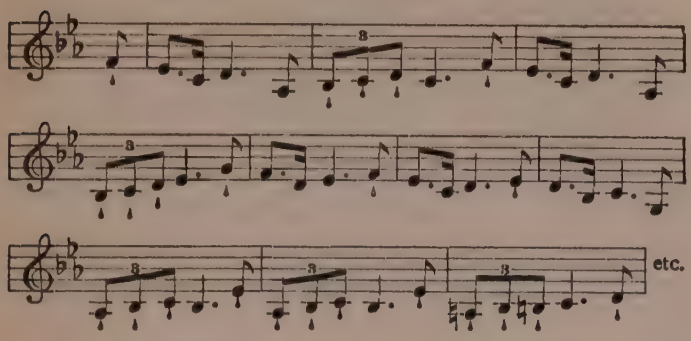
till, at last, in the depths of its exhaustion, the starting eye sees the glimmering of the highest bliss of attainment. It is the ecstasy of dying, of the surrender of being, of the final redemption into that wondrous realm from which we wander farthest when we strive to take it by force. Shall we call this Death? Is it not rather the wonder world of night, out of which, so says the story, the ivy and the vine sprang forth in tight embrace o'er the tomb of Tristan and Isolde?

If we place ourselves in spirit among the personages of Wagner's play, we shall find ourselves at the parting of the curtain which hangs between the real and the mimic world, on board a mediæval ship, within a few hours' sail of Cornwall, whither *Tristan* is bearing *Isolde* to be the wife of his king *Marke*. The cheery song of a sailor who, unseen, at the masthead, sings to the winds which are blowing him away from his wild Irish sweetheart, floats down to us. It has a refreshing and buoyant lilt, this song, with something of the sea breeze in it, and yet something, as it is sung, which emphasizes the loneliness of the singer:—



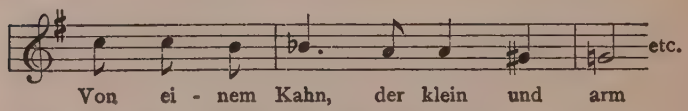
An innocent song, the strain of which, more decorous than any modern chantey, inspires the

sailors as they pull at the ropes, and gives voice to the delights of the peaceful voyage: —



Yet it stirs up a tempest in the soul of *Isolde*. She is the daughter of an Irish queen, a sorceress, and she now deplores the degeneracy of her race and its former potency. Once her ancestors could command wind and wave, but now they can brew only balsamic potions. Wildly she invokes the elements to dash the ship to pieces, and when her maid, *Brangäne*, seeks to know the cause of her tumultuous disquiet, she tells the story of her love for *Tristan* and of its disgraceful requital. He had come to Ireland's queen to be healed of a wound received in battle. He had killed his enemy, and that enemy was *Morold*, *Isolde's* betrothed. The princess, ignorant of that fact, — ignorant, too, of his name, for he had called himself Tantris, — had herself nursed him back almost to health, when one day she found that a splinter of steel, taken from the head of *Morold*, where he had received the

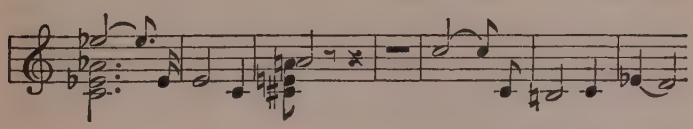
dolorous stroke, fitted into a nick in the sword of the wounded knight. At her mercy lay the slayer of her affianced husband. She raised the sword to take revenge, when his look fell upon her. In a twinkling her heart was empty of hate and filled instead with love. Now, instead of requiting her love, *Tristan* is taking her to Cornwall to deliver her to a loveless marriage to Cornwall's "weary king." It will be well to note in this narrative how the description of *Tristan's* sufferings are set to a descending chromatic passage, like the second voice of the principal theme already described: —



The thought of her humiliation maddens the high-spirited woman, and she sends her maid, *Brangäne*, to summon the knight into her presence. The knight parleys diplomatically with the messenger. Duty keeps him at the helm, but once in port he will suffer no one but himself to escort the exalted lady into the presence of the king. At the last the maid is forced to deliver the command in the imperious words used by her mistress. This touches the pride of *Tristan's* squire, *Kurwenal*, who asks permission to frame an answer, and, receiving it, shouts a ballad of his master's method of paying tribute to Ireland with the head of his enemy; for the battle between *Tristan* and *Morold* had grown out of the effort made by the latter to collect tribute-

money from England. It is a stiff stave, rugged, forceful, and direct, in which the spirit of the political ballad of all times is capitally preserved.

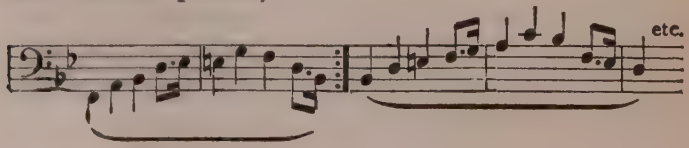
Isolde resolves to wipe out what she conceives to be her disgrace by slaying *Tristan* and herself. *Brangäne* tries to persuade her that the crown of Cornwall will bring her honor, and when *Isolde* answers that it would be intolerable to live in the presence of *Tristan* and not have his love, she hints that her mother had not sent her into a strange land without providing for all contingencies. *Isolde* understands the allusion to her mother's magical lore, and commands that a casket be brought to her. *Brangäne* obeys with alacrity and exhibits its contents: lotions for wounds, antidotes for poisons, and, best of all, — she holds a phial aloft. *Isolde* will not have it so; she herself had marked the phial whose contents were to remedy her ills. "The death draught!" exclaims *Brangäne*, and immediately the "Yo, heave ho!" of the sailors is heard and the shout of "Land!" Throughout this scene a significant phrase is heard — the symbol of death: —



Also the symbol of fate — a downward leap of a seventh, as in the last two notes of the brief figure illustrative of the glance which had inspired *Isolde's* fatal love.

At sight of land *Tristan* leaves the helm and presents himself before *Isolde*. She upbraids him for having avoided her during the voyage; he replies that he had obeyed the commands of honor and custom. She reminds him that a debt of blood is due her — he owes her revenge for the death of *Morold*. *Tristan* offers her his sword and his breast; but she declines to kill the best of all *Marke's* knights, and offers to drink with him a cup of forgiveness. He divines her purpose and takes the cup from her hand and gives this pledge: Fidelity to his honor, defiance to anguish. To his heart's illusion, his scarcely apprehended dream, will he drink the draught which shall bring oblivion. Before he has emptied the cup, *Isolde* snatches it from his hands and drains it to the bottom. Thus they meet their doom, which is not death and surcease of sorrow, as both had believed, but life and misery; for *Brangäne*, who had been commanded to pour the poison in the cup, had followed an amiable prompting and presented the love-potion instead. A moment of bewilderment, and the fated ones are in each other's arms, pouring out an ecstasy of passion. Then her maids robe *Isolde* to receive the king, who is coming on board the ship to greet his bride.

In the introduction to the second act, based upon this restless phrase, —



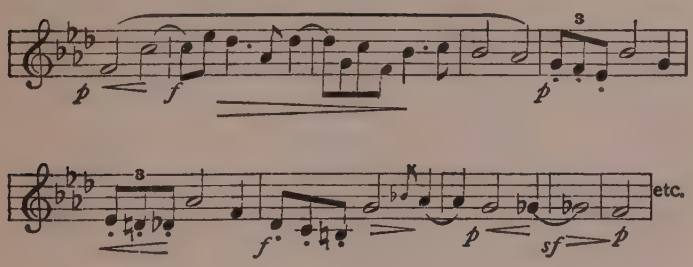
we have a picture of the longing and impatience of the lovers before a meeting. When the curtains part, we discover a garden before the chamber of *Isolde,* who is now Cornwall's queen. It is a lovely night in summer. A torch burns in a ring beside the door opening into the chamber at the top of a stone staircase. The king has gone a-hunting, and the tones of the hunting-horns, dying away in the distance, blend entrancingly with an instrumental song from the orchestra which seems a musical sublimation of night and nature in their tenderest moods. *Isolde* appears with *Brangäne* and pleads with her to extinguish the torch and thus give the appointed signal to *Tristan,* who is waiting in concealment. But *Brangäne* suspects treachery on the part of *Melot,* a knight who is jealous of *Tristan* and himself enamoured of *Isolde.* It was he who had planned the nocturnal hunt. She warns her mistress, and begs her to wait. Beauty rests upon the scene like a benediction. To *Isolde* the horns are but the rustling of the forest leaves as they are caressed by the wind, or the purling and laughing of the brook. Longing has eaten up all patience, all discretion, all fear. In spite of *Brangäne's* pleadings she extinguishes the torch, and with wildly waving scarf beckons on her hurrying lover. Beneath the foliage they sing their love through all the gamut of hope and despair, of bliss and wretchedness. The duet consists largely of detached ejaculations and verbal plays, each paraphrasing or varying or giving a new turn to the outpouring of the

other, the whole permeated with the symbolism of pessimistic philosophy in which night, death, and oblivion are glorified, and day, life, and memory contemned. In this dialogue lies the key to the philosophy which Wagner has proclaimed in the tragedy. In Wagner's exposition of the prelude we saw that he wishes us to observe "the one glimmering of the highest bliss of attainment" in the "surrender of being," the "final redemption into that wondrous realm from which we wander farthest when we try to take it by force." For this realm he chooses death and night as symbols, but what he means to imply is the nirvana of Buddhistic philosophy, the final deliverance of the soul from transmigration. Such love as that of *Tristan* and *Isolde* presented itself to Wagner as ceaseless struggle and endless contradiction, and for this problem nirvana alone offers a happy outcome; it means quietude and identity.

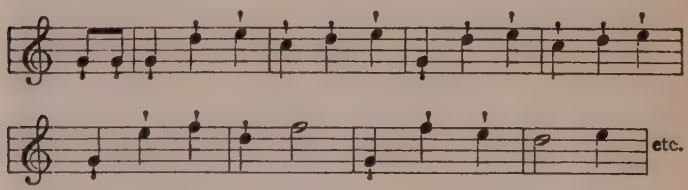
In vain does *Brangäne* sing her song of warning from the tower; the lovers have been transported beyond all realization of their surroundings; they sing on, dream on in each other's arms, until at the moment of supremest ecstasy there comes a rude interruption. *Kurwenal* dashes in with a sword and a shout: "Save thyself, *Tristan!*" the king, *Melot*, and courtiers at his heels. Day, symbol of all that is fatal to their love, has dawned. *Tristan* is silent, though *Marke* bewails the treachery of his nephew and his friend. From the words of the heart-torn king we learn that he had been forced

into the marriage with *Isolde* by the disturbed state of his kingdom, and had not consented to it until *Tristan*, whose purpose it was thus to quiet the jealous anger of the barons, had threatened to depart from Cornwall unless the king revoked his purpose to make him his successor, and took unto himself a wife. *Tristan's* answer to the sorrowful upbraidings of his royal uncle is to obtain a promise from *Isolde* to follow him into the "wondrous realm of night." Then, seeing that *Marke* does not wield the sword of retribution, he makes a feint of attacking *Melot*, but permits the treacherous knight to reach him with his sword. He falls wounded unto death.

The last act has been reached. The dignified, reserved knight of the first act, the impassioned lover of the second, is now a dream-haunted, longing, despairing, dying man, lying under a lime tree in the yard of his ancestral castle in Brittany, wasting his last bit of strength in feverish fancies and ardent yearnings touching *Isolde*. *Kurwenal* has sent for her. Will she come? A shepherd tells of vain watches for the sight of a sail by playing a mournful melody on his pipe:—



Oh, the heart-hunger of the hero! The longing! Will she never come? The fever is consuming him, and his heated brain breeds fancies which one moment lift him above all memories of pain and the next bring him to the verge of madness. Cooling breezes waft him again toward Ireland, whose princess healed the wound struck by *Morold*, then ripped it up again with the avenging sword with its telltale nick. From her hands he took the drink whose poison sears his heart. Accursed the cup and accursed the hand that brewed it! Will the shepherd never change his doleful strain? Ah, *Isolde*, how beautiful you are! The ship, the ship! It must be in sight. *Kurwenal*, have you no eyes? *Isolde's* ship! A merry tune bursts from the shepherd's pipe:—



It is the ship! What flag flies at the peak? The flag of "All's well!" Now the ship disappears behind a cliff. There the breakers are treacherous. Who is at the helm? Friend or foe? *Melot's* accomplice? Are you, too, a traitor, *Kurwenal?* *Tristan's* strength is unequal to the excitement of the moment. His mind becomes dazed. He hears *Isolde's* voice, and his wandering fancy transforms it into the torch whose extinction once summoned

him to her side: "Do I hear the light?" He staggers to his feet and tears the bandages from his wound. "Ha! my blood! flow merrily now! She who opened the wound is here to heal it!" Life endures but for one embrace, one glance, one word: "*Isolde!*" While *Isolde* lies mortally stricken upon *Tristan's* corpse, *Marke* and his train arrive upon a second ship. *Brangäne* has told the secret of the love-draught, and the king has come to unite the lovers. But his purpose is not known, and faithful *Kurwenal* receives his death-blow while trying to hold the castle against *Marke's* men. He dies at *Tristan's* side. *Isolde*, unconscious of all these happenings, sings out her broken heart, and expires.

And ere her ear might hear, her heart had heard,
Nor sought she sign for witness of the word;
But came and stood above him, newly dead,
And felt his death upon her: and her head
Bowed, as to reach the spring that slakes all drouth;
And their four lips became one silent mouth.[1]

[1] Swinburne, "Tristram of Lyonesse."

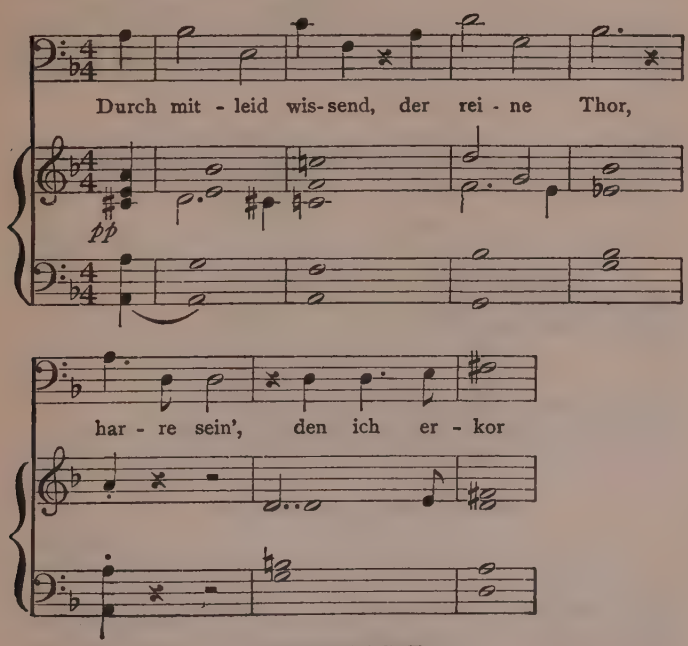
CHAPTER XIV

"PARSIFAL"

A LAD, hotfoot in pursuit of a wild swan which one of his arrows has pierced, finds himself in a forest glade on the side of a mountain. There he meets a body of knights and esquires in attendance on a king who is suffering from a wound. The knights are a body of men whose mission it is to succor suffering innocence wherever they may find it. They dwell in a magnificent castle on the summit of the mountain, within whose walls they assemble every day to contemplate and adore a miraculous vessel from which they obtain both physical and spiritual sustenance. In order to enjoy the benefits which flow from this talisman, they are required to preserve their bodies in ascetic purity. Their king has fallen from this estate and been grievously wounded in an encounter with a magician, who, having failed in his ambition to enter the order of knighthood, had built a castle over against that of the king, where, by practice of the black art and with the help of sirens and a sorceress, he seeks the ruin of the pure and celestial soldiery. In his hands is a lance which once belonged to the knights, but which he had wrested from their king

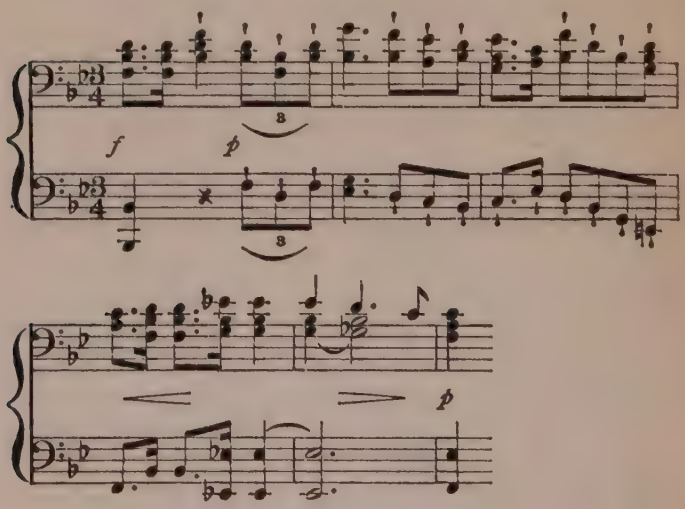
and with which he had given the dolorous stroke from which the king is suffering.

The healing of the king can be wrought only by a touch of the lance which struck the wound; and this lance can be regained only by one able to withstand the sensual temptations with which the evil-minded sorcerer has surrounded himself in his magical castle. An oracle, that had spoken from a vision, which one day shone about the talisman, had said that this deliverer should be a guileless fool, an innocent simpleton, whom compassionate pity had made knowing:—



THE ORACLE

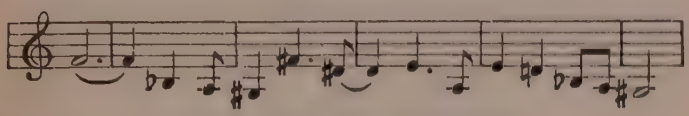
For this hero king and knights are waiting and longing, since neither lotions nor baths nor ointments can bring relief, though they be of the rarest potency and brought from all the ends of the earth. The lad who thus finds himself in this worshipful but woful company is himself of noble and knightly lineage. This we learn from the recital of his history, but also from the bright, incisive, militant, chivalresque music associated with him: —



THE SYMBOL OF PARSIFAL

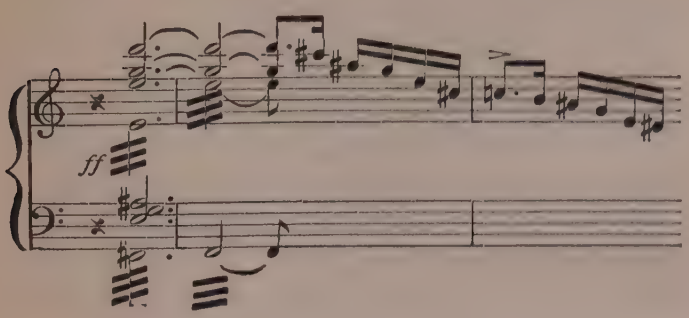
But he has been reared in a wilderness, far from courts and the institutions of chivalry and in igno-

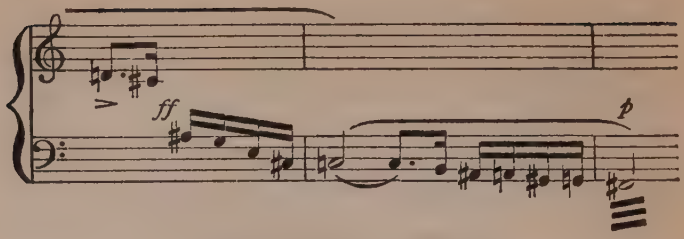
rance of the world lying beyond his forest boundaries. His father died before he was born, and his mother withheld from him all knowledge of knighthood, hoping thus to keep him for herself. One day, however, he saw a cavalcade of horsemen in brilliant trappings. The spectacle stirred the chivalric spirit slumbering within him; he deserted his mother, followed after the knights, and set out in quest of adventure. The mother died:—



THE SYMBOL OF HERZELEIDE

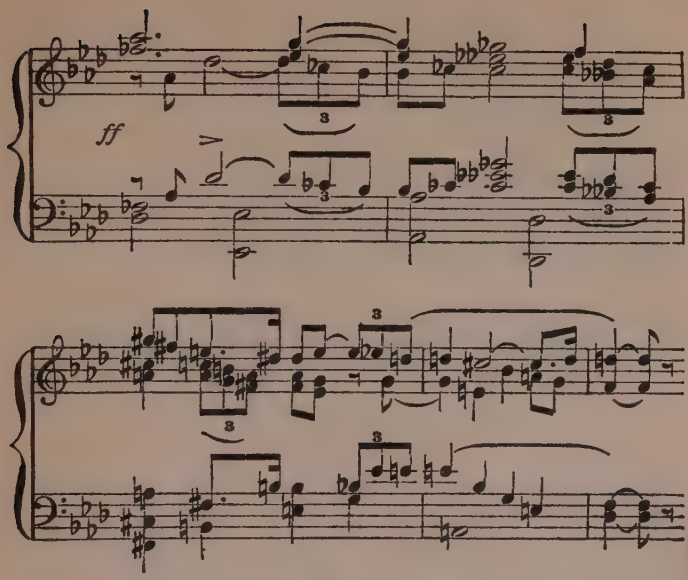
In the domain whither his quarry had led the lad, all animals were held sacred. A knight (*Gurnemanz*) rebukes him for his misdeed in shooting the swan, and rue leads him to break his bow and arrows. From a strange creature (*Kundry*),—





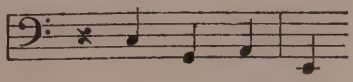
THE PENITENT KUNDRY

in the service of the knights, he learns of the death of his mother, who had perished for love of him and grief over his desertion. He is questioned about himself, but is singularly ignorant of everything, even of his own name. Hoping that the lad may prove to be the guileless fool to whom knowledge was to come through pity, the knight escorts him to the temple, which is the sanctuary of the talisman whose adoration is the daily occupation of the brotherhood. They walk out of the forest and find themselves in a rocky defile of the mountain. A natural gateway opens in the face of a cliff, through which they pass, and are lost to sight for a space. Then they are seen ascending a sloping passage, and little by little the rocks lose their ruggedness and begin to take on rude architectural contours. They are walking to music which, while merely suggesting their progress and the changing natural scene in the main, ever and anon breaks into an expression of the most poignant and lacerating suffering and lamentation:—

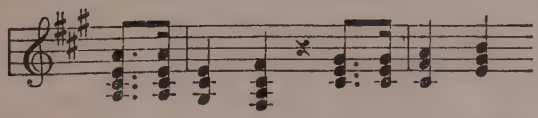


SUFFERING AND LAMENTATION

Soon the pealing of bells is heard:—



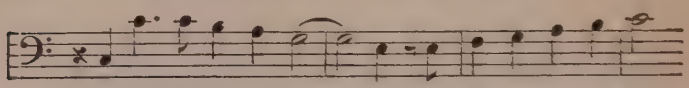
and the tones blend synchronously and harmoniously with the music of their march:—



FUNDAMENTAL PHRASE OF THE MARCH

At last they arrive in a mighty Byzantine hall, which loses itself upward in a lofty, vaulted dome,

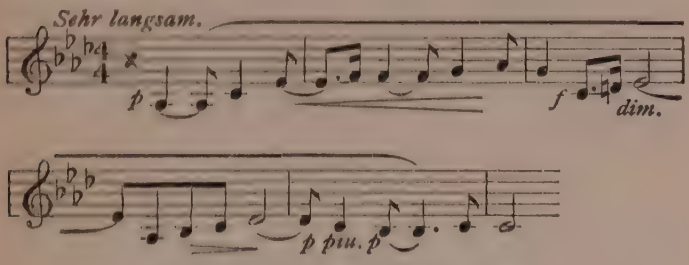
from which light streams downward and illumines the interior. Under the dome, within a colonnade, are two tables, each a segment of a circle. Into the hall there come in procession knights wearing red mantles on which the image of a white dove is embroidered. They chant a pious hymn as they take their places at the refectory tables: —



THE EUCHARISTIC HYMN

The king, whom the lad had seen in the glade, is borne in on a litter, before him a veiled shrine containing the mystical cup which is the object of the ceremonious worship. It is the duty of the king to unveil the talisman and hold it up to the adoration of the knights. He is conveyed to a raised couch and the shrine is placed before him. His sufferings of mind and body are so poignant that he would liever die than perform his office; but the voice of his father (*Titurel*), who had built the sanctuary, established the order of knighthood, and now lives on in his grave sustained by the sight of the talisman, admonishes the king of his duty. At length he consents to perform the function imposed upon him by his office. He raises himself painfully upon his couch. The attendants remove the covering from the shrine and disclose an antique crystal vessel which they reverently place before the lamen-

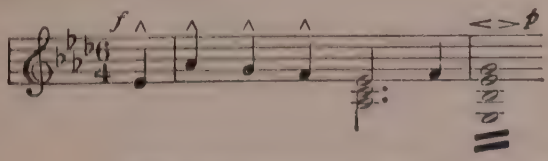
table king. Boys' voices come wafted down from the highest height of the dome, singing a formula of consecration: "Take ye my body, take my blood in token of our love":—



THE LOVE-FEAST FORMULA

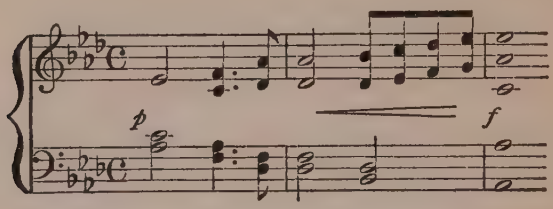
A dazzling ray of light flashes down from above and falls into the cup, which now glows with a reddish purple lustre and sheds a soft radiance around. The knights have sunk upon their knees. The king lifts the luminous chalice, moves it gently from side to side, and thus blesses the bread and wine provided for the refection of the knights. Meanwhile, celestial voices proclaim the words of the oracle to musical strains that are pregnant with mysterious suggestion.

Another choir sturdily, firmly, ecstatically hymns the power of faith:—



THE SYMBOL OF FAITH

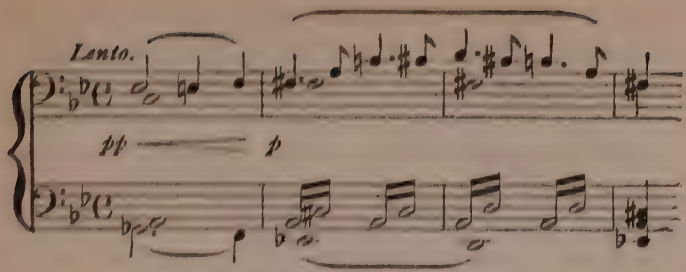
and, at the end, an impressive antiphon, starting with the knights, ascends higher and higher, and, calling in gradually the voices of invisible singers in the middle height, becomes metamorphosed into an angelic canticle as it takes its flight to the summit. It is the voice of aspiration, the musical symbol of the talisman which directs the thoughts and desires of its worshippers ever upward: —



THE SYMBOL OF THE HOLY GRAIL

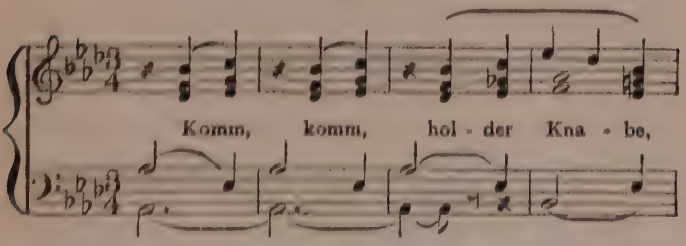
The lad disappoints his guide. He understands nothing of the solemn happenings which he has witnessed, nor does he ask their meaning, though his own heart had been lacerated with pain at sight of the king's sufferings. He is driven from the sanctuary with contumely.

He wanders forth in quest of further adventures and enters the magical garden surrounding the castle of the sorcerer. A number of knights who are sent against him he puts to rout. Now the magician summons lovely women, clad in the habiliments of flowers, to seduce him with their charms: —



KLINGSOR'S INCANTATION

They sing and play about him with winsome wheedlings and cajoleries, with insinuating blandishments and dainty flatteries, with pretty petulancies and delectable quarrellings: —



THE SEDUCTIVE SONG OF THE FLOWER MAIDENS

But they fail of their purpose, as does also an unwilling siren whom the magician invokes with powerful conjurations. It is *Kundry*, who is half Magdalen, half wicked sorceress, a messenger in the service of the pious knights, and as such hideous of aspect; a tool in the hands of the magician, and as such supernaturally beautiful. It was to her

charms that the suffering king had yielded. To win the youth she tells him the story of his mother's death and gives to him her last message and — a kiss! At the touch of her impure lips a flood of passion, hitherto unfelt, pours through the veins of the lad, and in its surge comes understanding of the suffering and woe which he had witnessed in the castle on the mountain. Also a sense of his own remissness. Compassionate pity brings enlightenment; and he thrusts back the woman who is seeking to destroy him. Finding that the wiles of his tool have availed him naught, the wicked magician himself appears to give battle, for he, too, knows the oracle and fears the coming of the king's deliverer and the loss of the weapon which he hopes will yet enable him to achieve the mystical talisman. He hurls the lance at the youth, but it remains suspended in midair. The lad seizes it, makes the sign of the cross, speaks some words of exorcism, and garden, castle, damsels — all the works of enchantment disappear.

Now the young hero is conscious of a mission. He must find again the abode of the knights and their ailing king, and bring to them surcease of suffering. After long and grievous wanderings he is again directed to the castle. Grief and despair have overwhelmed the knights, whose king, unable longer to endure the torture in which he has lived, has definitively refused to perform his holy office. In consequence, his father, no longer the recipient of supernatural sustenance, has died, and the king

longs to follow him. The hero touches the wound in the side of the king with the sacred spear, ends his dolors, and is hailed as king in his place. The temptress, who has followed him as a penitent, freed from a curse which had rested upon her for ages, goes to a blissful and eternal rest.

* * *

Such is the story of Wagner's "Parsifal." It is the purpose of this book to help the musical layman who loves lyric drama to enjoyment. Criticism might do this, but a purpose of simple exposition has already been proclaimed, and shall be adhered to lest some reader think that he is being led too far afield. In this case the exposition shall take the form of a marshalling of the elements of the story in two aspects — religious and legendary. Careful readers of English literature will have had no difficulty in recognizing in it a story of the quest of the Holy Grail. Tennyson will have taught them that the hero is that

> Sir Percivale
> Whom Arthur and his knighthood called the Pure;

that the talismanic vessel is

> the cup itself from which our Lord
> Drank at the last sad supper with His own;

that the lance which struck and healed the grievous wound in the side of the king is the spear with which the side of the Christ was pierced on Calvary. It is also obvious that the king, whose name is

Amfortas, that is, "the powerless one," is a symbol of humanity suffering from the wounds of slavery to desire; that the heroic act of *Parsifal*, as Wagner calls him, which brings release to the king and his knights, is renunciation of desire, prompted by pity, compassion, fellow-suffering; and that this gentle emotion it was that had inspired knowledge simultaneously of a great need and a means of deliverance. The ethical idea of the drama, as I set forth in a book entitled "Studies in the Wagnerian Drama" many years ago, is that it is the enlightenment which comes through pity which brings salvation. The allusion is to the redemption of mankind by the sufferings and compassionate death of Christ; and that stupendous tragedy is the prefiguration of the mimic drama which Wagner has constructed. The spectacle to which he invites us, and with which he hoped to impress us and move us to an acceptance of the lesson underlying his play, is the adoration of the Holy Grail, cast in the form of a mimicry of the Last Supper, bedizened with some of the glittering pageantry of mediæval knighthood and romance.

In the minds of many persons it is a profanation to make a stage spectacle out of religious things; and it has been urged that "Parsifal" is not only religious but specifically Christian; not only Christian but filled with parodies of elements which are partly liturgical, partly Biblical. In narrating the incidents of the play I have purposely avoided all allusions to the things which have been matters

of controversy. It is possible to look upon "Parsifal" as a sort of glorified fairy tale, and to this end I purpose to subject its elements to inquiry, and shall therefore go a bit more into detail. Throughout the play *Parsifal* is referred to as a redeemer, and in the third act scenes in which he plays as the central figure are borrowed from the life of Christ. *Kundry*, the sorceress, who attempts his destruction at one time and is in the service of the knights of the Grail at another, anoints his feet and dries them with her hair, as the Magdalen did the feet of Christ in the house of Simon the Pharisee. *Parsifal* baptizes *Kundry* and admonishes her to believe in the Redeemer: —

Die Taufe nimm
Und glaub' an den Erlöser!

Kundry weeps. Unto the woman who was a sinner and wept at His feet Christ said: "Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace." At the elevation of the grail by *Parsifal* after the healing of *Amfortas* a dove descends from the dome and hovers over the new king's head. What saith the Scripture? "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him." (St. Matthew iii. 16.) It would be idle to argue that these things are not Biblical, though the reported allusions to *Parsifal* as a redeemer do not of necessity belong in the

category. We shall see presently that the drama is permeated with Buddhism, and there were a multitude of redeemers and saviours in India besides the Buddha.

Let us look at the liturgical elements. The Holy Grail is a chalice. It is brought into the temple in solemn procession in a veiled shrine and deposited on a table. Thus, also, the chalice, within its pall, is brought in at the sacrament of the mass and placed on the altar before the celebrant. In the drama boys' voices sing in the invisible heights: —

> Nehmet hin mein Blut
> Um unserer Liebe willen!
> Nehmet hin meinem Leib
> Auf dass ihr mein gedenkt!

Is there a purposed resemblance here to the words of consecration in the mass? *Accipite, et manducate ex hoc omnes. Hoc est enim Corpus meum. Accipite, et bibite ex eo omnes. Hic est enim Calix sanguinis mei!* In a moment made wonderfully impressive by Wagner's music, while *Amfortas* bends over the grail and the knights are on their knees, a ray of light illumines the cup and it glows red. *Amfortas* lifts it high, gently sways it from side to side, and blesses the bread and wine which youthful servitors have placed beside each knight on the table. In the book of the play, as the hall gradually grows light the cups before the knights appear filled with red wine, and beside each lies a small loaf of bread. Now the celestial choristers

sing: "The wine and bread of the Last Supper, once the Lord of the Grail, through pity's love-power, changed into the blood which he shed, into the body which he offered. To-day the Redeemer whom ye laud changes the blood and body of the sacrificial offering into the wine poured out for you, and the bread that you eat!" And the knights respond antiphonally: "Take of the bread; bravely change it anew into strength and power. Faithful unto death, staunch in effort to do the works of the Lord. Take of the blood; change it anew to life's fiery flood. Gladly in communion, faithful as brothers, to fight with blessed courage." Are these words, or are they not, a paraphrase of those which in the canon of the mass follow the first and second ablutions of the celebrant: *Quod ore sumpsimus Domine*, etc., and: *Corpus tuum, Domine*, etc.? He would be but little critical who would deny it.

Nevertheless, it does not necessarily follow that Wagner wished only to parody the eucharistic rite. He wanted to create a ceremonial which should be beautiful, solemn, and moving; which should be an appropriate accompaniment to the adoration of a mystical relic; which should, in a large sense, be neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Buddhistic; which should symbolize a conception of atonement older than Christianity, older than Buddhism, older than all records of the human imagination. Of this more anon. As was his custom, Wagner drew from whatever source seemed to him good and fruitful: and though he doubtless thought himself

at liberty to receive suggestions from the Roman Catholic ritual, as well as the German Lutheran, it is even possible that he had also before his mind scenes from Christian Masonry. This possibility was once suggested by Mr. F. C. Burnand, who took the idea from the last scene of the first act only, and does not seem to have known how many connections the Grail legend had with mediæval Freemasonry or Templarism. There are more elements associated with the old Knights Templars and their rites in Wagner's drama than I am able to discuss. To do so I should have to be an initiate and have more space at my disposal than I have here. I can only make a few suggestions: In the old Welsh tale of Peredur, which is a tale of the quest of a magical talisman, the substitute for the grail is a dish containing a bloody head. That head in time, as the legend passed through the imaginations of poets and romances, became the head of John the Baptist, and there was a belief in the Middle Ages that the Knights Templars worshipped a bloody head. The head of John the Baptist enters dimly into Wagner's drama in the conceit that *Kundry* is a reincarnation of Herodias, who is doomed to make atonement, not for having danced the head off the prophet's shoulders, but for having reviled Christ as he was staggering up Calvary under the load of the cross. But this is pursuing speculations into regions that are shadowy and vague. Let it suffice for this branch of our study that Mr. Burnand has given expression to the

theory that the scene of the adoration of the grail and the Love Feast may also have a relationship with the ceremony of installation in the Masonic orders of chivalry, in which a cup of brotherly love is presented to the Grand Commander, who drinks and asks the Sir Knights to pledge him in the cup "in commemoration of the Last Supper of our Grand Heavenly Captain, with his twelve disciples, whom he commanded thus to remember him." Here, says Mr. Burnand, there is no pretence to sacrifice. Participation in the wine is a symbol of a particular and peculiarly close intercommunion of brotherhood.

To get the least offence from "Parsifal" it ought to be accepted in the spirit of the time in which Christian symbolism was grafted on the old tales of the quest of a talisman which lie at the bottom of it. The time was the last quarter of the twelfth century and the first quarter of the thirteenth. It is the period of the third and fourth crusades. Relic worship was at its height. Less than a hundred years before (in 1101) the Genoese crusaders had brought back from the Holy Land as a part of the spoils of Cæsarea, which they were helpful in capturing under Baldwin, a three-cornered dish, which was said to be the veritable dish used at the Last Supper of Christ and his Apostles. The belief that it was cut out of a solid emerald drew Bonaparte's attention to it, and he carried it away to Paris in 1806 and had it examined. It proved to be nothing but glass, and he graciously gave it back to

Genoa in 1814. There it still reposes in the Church of St. John, but it is no longer an object of worship, though it might fairly excite a feeling of veneration.

For 372 years Nuremberg possessed what the devout believed to be the lance of Longinus, with which the side of Christ was opened. The relic, like most objects of its kind (the holy coat, for instance), had a rival which, after inspiring victory at the siege of Antioch, found its way to Paris with the most sacred relics, for which Louis IX built the lovely Sainte Chapelle; now it is in the basilica of the Vatican, at Rome. The Nuremberg relic, however, enjoyed the advantage of historical priority. It is doubly interesting, or rather was so, because it was one of Wagner's historical characters who added it to the imperial treasure of the Holy Roman Empire. This was none other than Henry the Fowler, the king who is righteous in judgment and tuneful of speech in the opera "Lohengrin." Henry, so runs the story, wrested the lance from the Burgundian king, Rudolph III, some time about A.D. 929. After many vicissitudes the relic was given for safe keeping to the imperial city of Nuremberg, in 1424, by the Emperor Sigismund. It was placed in a casket, which was fastened with heavy chains to the walls of the Spitalkirche. There it remained until 1796. One may read about the ceremonies attending its annual exposition, along with other relics, in the old history of Nuremberg, by Wagenseil, which was the source of Wagner's knowledge of the mastersingers. The disruption

of the Holy Roman Empire caused a scattering of the jewels and relics in the imperial treasury, and the present whereabouts of this sacred lance is unknown. The casket and chains, however, are preserved in the Germanic Museum at Nuremberg to this day, and there have been seen, doubtless, by many who are reading these lines.

There is nothing in "Parsifal," neither personage nor incident nor thing, no principle of conduct, which did not live in legendary tales and philosophical systems long before Christianity existed as a universal religion. The hero in his first estate was born, bred, went out in search of adventure, rescued the suffering, and righted wrong, just as Krishna, Perseus, Theseus, Œdipus, Romulus, Remus, Siegfried, and Wolf-Dietrich did before him. He is an Aryan legendary and mythical hero-type that has existed for ages. The talismanic cup and spear are equally ancient; they have figured in legend from time immemorial. The incidents of their quest, the agonies wrought by their sight, their mission as inviters of sympathetic interest, and the failure of a hero to achieve a work of succor because of failure to show pity, are all elements in Keltic Quester and Quest stories, which antedate Christianity. *Kundry*, the loathly damsel and siren, has her prototypes in classic fable and romantic tale. Read the old English ballad of "The Marriage of Sir Gawain." So has the magic castle of *Klingsor*, surrounded by its beautiful garden. It is all the things which I enumerated in the chapter devoted

to "Tannhäuser." It is also the Underworld, where prevails the law of taboo — "Thou must," or "Thou shalt not;" whither Psyche went on her errand for Venus and came back scot-free; where Peritheus and Theseus remained grown to a rocky seat till Hercules came to release them with mighty wrench and a loss of their bodily integrity. The sacred lance which shines red with blood after it has by its touch healed the wound of *Amfortas* is the bleeding spear which was a symbol of righteous vengeance unperformed in the old Bardic day of Britain; it became the lance of Longinus which pierced the side of Christ when Christian symbolism was applied to the ancient Arthurian legends; and you may read in Malory's "Morte d'Arthur" how a dolorous stroke dealt with it by Balin opened a wound in the side of King Pellam from which he suffered many years, till Galahad healed him in the quest of the Sangreal by touching the wound with the blood which flowed from the spear.

These are the folklore elements in Wagner's "Parsifal." It is plain that they might have been wrought into a drama substantially like that which was the poet-composer's last gift to art without loss of either dignity or beauty. Then his drama would have been like a glorified fairy play, imposing and of gracious loveliness, and there would have been nothing to quarrel about. But Wagner was a philosopher of a sort, and a sincere believer in the idea that the theatre might be made to occupy the same place in the modern world that it did in

the classic. It was to replace the Church and teach by direct preachments as well as allegory the philosophical notions which he thought essential to the salvation of humanity. For the chief of these he went to that system of philosophy which rests on the idea that the world is to be redeemed by negation of the will to live, the conquering of all desire — that the highest happiness is the achievement of nirvana, nothingness. This conception finds its highest expression in the quietism and indifferentism of the old Brahmanic religion (if such it can be called), in which holiness was to be obtained by speculative contemplation, which seems to me the quintessence of selfishness. In the reformed Brahmanism called Buddhism, there appeared along with the old principle of self-erasure a compassionate sympathy for others. Asceticism was not put aside, but regulated and ordered, wrought into a communal system. It was purged of some of its selfishness by appreciation of the loveliness of compassionate love as exemplified in the life of Çakya-Muni and those labors which made him one of the many redeemers and saviours of which Hindu literature is full. Something of this was evidently in the mind of Wagner as long ago as 1857, when, working on "Tristan und Isolde," he for a while harbored the idea of bringing Parzival (as he would have called him then) into the presence of the dying *Tristan* to comfort him with a sermon on the happiness of renunciation. Long before Wagner had sketched a tragedy entitled

"Jesus of Nazareth," the hero of which was to be a human philosopher who preached the saving grace of love and sought to redeem his time and people from the domination of conventional law, the offspring of selfishness. His philosophy was socialism imbued by love. Before Wagner finished "Tristan und Isolde" he had outlined a Hindu play in which hero and heroine were to accept the doctrines of the Buddha, take the vow of chastity, renounce the union toward which love impelled them, and enter into the holy community. Blending these two schemes, Wagner created "Parsifal." For this drama he could draw the principle of compassionate pity and fellow-suffering from the stories of both Çakya-Muni and Jesus of Nazareth. But for the sake of a spectacle, I think, he accepted the Christian doctrine of the Atonement with all its mystical elements; for they alone put the necessary symbolical significance into the principal apparatus of the play — the Holy Grail and the Sacred Lance.[1]

[1] "Parsifal" was performed for the first time at the Wagner Festival Theatre in Bayreuth on July 28, 1882. The prescription that it should belong exclusively to Bayreuth was respected till December 24, 1903, when Heinrich Conried, taking advantage of the circumstance that there was no copyright on the stage representation of the work in America, brought it out with sensational success at the Metropolitan Opera-house in New York. The principal artists concerned in this and subsequent performances were Milka Ternina (*Kundry*), Alois Burgstaller (*Parsifal*), Anton Van Rooy (*Amfortas*), Robert Blass (*Gurnemanz*), Otto Goritz (*Klingsor*) and Louise Homer (*a voice*).

CHAPTER XV

"DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG"

THE best definition of the true purpose of comedy which I know is that it is to "chastise manners with a smile" (*Ridendo castigat mores*); and it has no better exemplification in the literature of opera than Wagner's "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg." Wagner's mind dwelt much on Greek things, and as he followed a classical principle in choosing mythological and legendary subjects for his tragedies, so also he followed classical precedent in drawing the line between tragedy and comedy. "Tannhäuser," "Tristan und Isolde," "Der Ring des Nibelungen," "Parsifal," and, in a lesser degree, "Lohengrin," are examples of the old tragedy type. To them the restrictions of time and space do not apply. They deal with large passions, and their heroes are gods or godlike men who are shattered against the rock of immutable law — the "Fate" of the ancient tragedians. His only significant essay in the field of comedy was made in "Die Meistersinger," and this is as faithful to the old conception of comedy as the dramas mentioned are to that of tragedy. It deals with the manners, vices, and follies of the common people; and, therefore, it has local environment and illustrates a period in history.

It was conceived as a satyr-play following a tragedy ("Tannhäuser"), and though there can be no doubt that it was designed to teach a lesson in art, it nevertheless aims primarily to amuse, and only secondarily to instruct and correct. Moreover, even the most cutting of its satirical lashes are administered with a smile.

As a picture of the social life of a quaint German city three and a half centuries ago, its vividness and truthfulness are beyond all praise; it is worthy to stand beside the best dramas of the world, and has no equal in operatic literature. The food for its satire, too, is most admirably chosen, for no feature of the social life of that place and period is more amiably absurd than the efforts of the handicraftsmen and tradespeople, with their prosaic surroundings, to keep alive by dint of pedantic formularies the spirit of minstrelsy, which had a natural stimulus in the chivalric life of the troubadours and minnesingers of whom the mastersingers thought themselves the direct and legitimate successors. In its delineation of the pompous doings of the mastersingers, Wagner is true to the letter. He has vitalized the dry record to be found in old Wagenseil's book on Nuremberg,[1] and intensified the vivid description of a mastersingers' meeting which the curious may read in August Hagen's novel

[1] "Joh. Christophori Wagenseilii De Sacri Rom. Imperii Libera Civitate Noribergensi Commentatio. Accedit, De Germaniæ Phonascorum Von Der Meister-Singer Origine, Præstantia, Utilitate, et Institutis, Sermone Vernaculo Liber. Altdorf Noricorum Typis Impensisque Jodoci Wilhelmi Kohlesii. CIↃ ICↃ XCVII."

"Norica." His studies have been marvellously exact and careful, and he has put Wagenseil's book under literal and liberal contribution, as will appear after a while. Now it seems best to tell the story of the comedy before discussing it further.

Veit Pogner, a rich silversmith, desiring to honor the craft of the mastersingers, to whose guild he belongs, offers his daughter *Eva* in marriage to the successful competitor at the annual meeting of the mastersingers on the feast of St. John. *Eva* is in love (she declares it in the impetuous manner peculiar to Wagner's heroines) with *Walther von Stolzing*, a young Franconian knight; and the knight with her. After a flirtation in church during divine service, *Walther* meets her before she leaves the building, and asks if she be betrothed. She answers in the affirmative, but it is to the unknown victor at the contest of singing on the morrow. He resolves to enter the guild so as to be qualified for the competition. A trial of candidates takes place in the church of St. Catherine in the afternoon, and *Walther*, knowing nothing of the rules of the mastersingers, some of which have hurriedly been outlined to him by *David*, a youngster who is an apprentice at shoemaking and also songmaking, fails, though *Hans Sachs*, a master in both crafts, recognizes evidences of genius in the knight's song, and espouses his cause as against *Beckmesser*, the town clerk, who aims at acquiring *Pogner's* fortune by winning his daughter. The young people, in despair at *Walther's* failure, are about to elope when they

are prevented by the arrival on the scene of *Beckmesser*. It is night, and he wishes to serenade *Eva*; *Sachs* sits cobbling at his bench, while *Eva's* nurse, *Magdalena*, disguised, sits at a window to hear the serenade in her mistress's stead. *Sachs* interrupts the serenader, who is an ill-natured clown, by lustily shouting a song in which he seeks also to give warning of knowledge of her intentions to *Eva*, whose departure with the knight had been interrupted by the cobbler when he came out of his shop to work in the cool of the evening; but he finally agrees to listen to *Beckmesser* on condition that he be permitted to mark each error in the composition by striking his lap-stone. The humorous consequences can be imagined. *Beckmesser* becomes enraged at *Sachs*, sings more and more falsely, until *Sachs* is occupied in beating a veritable tattoo on his lap-stone. To add to *Beckmesser's* discomfiture, *David*, *Sachs's* apprentice and *Magdalena's* sweetheart, thinking the serenade intended for his love, begins to belabor the singer with a club; neighbors join in the brawl, which proceeds right merrily until interrupted by the horn of a night watchman. The dignity and vigor of Wagner's poetical fancy are attested by the marvellous close of the act. The tremendous hubbub of the street brawl is at its height and the business of the act is at an end. The coming of the *Watchman*, who has evidently been aroused by the noise, is foretold by his horn. The crowd is seized with a panic. All the brawlers disappear behind doors. The sleepy *Watchman*

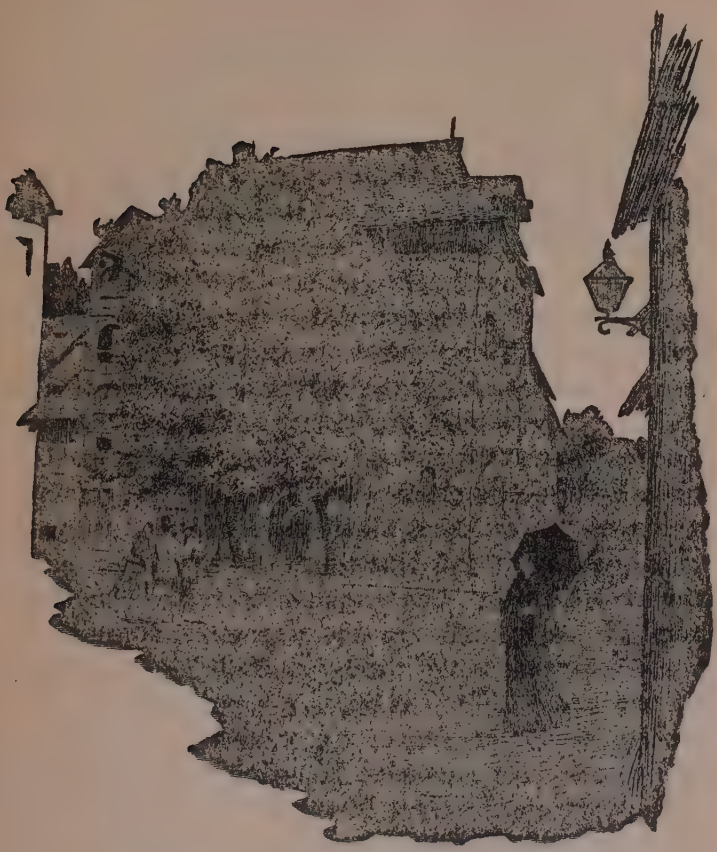
stares about him in amazement, rubs his eyes, sings the monotonous chant which publishes the hour of the night, continues on his round, and the moon shines on a quiet street in Nuremberg as the curtain falls.

In the third act *Walther*, who had been taken into his house by *Sachs* and spent the night there, sings a recital of a dream; and *Sachs*, struck by its beauty, transcribes it, punctuating it with bits of comments and advice. *Beckmesser*, entering *Sachs's* shop when the cobbler-poet is out for a moment, finds the song, concludes that it is *Sachs's* own composition, and appropriates it. *Sachs*, discovering the theft, gives the song to *Beckmesser*, who secures a promise from *Sachs* not to betray him, and resolves to sing it at the competition. The festival is celebrated in a meadow on the banks of the Pegnitz River, between Fürth and Nuremberg. It begins with a gathering of all the guilds of Nuremberg, each division in the procession entering to characteristic music — a real masterpiece, whether viewed as spectacle, poetry, or music. The competition begins, and *Beckmesser* makes a monstrously stupid parody of *Walther's* song. He is hooted at and ridiculed, and, becoming enraged, charges the authorship of the song on *Sachs*, who coolly retorts that it is a good song when correctly sung. To prove his words he calls on *Walther* to sing it. The knight complies, the mastersingers are delighted, and *Pogner* rewards the singer with *Eva's* hand. *Sachs*, at the request of the presiding officer of the guild, also offers him the medal as the insignia of

membership in the guild of mastersingers. *Walther's* experience with the pedantry which had condemned him the day before, when he had sung as impulse, love, and youthful ardor had prompted, leads him to decline the distinction; but the old poet discourses on the respect due to the masters and their work as the guaranty of the permanence of German art, and persuades him to enter the guild of mastersingers.

"Die Meistersinger" is photographic in many of its scenes, personages, and incidents; but so far as the stage pictures which we are accustomed to see in the opera-houses of New York and the European capitals are concerned, this statement must be taken with a great deal of allowance, owing to the fact that opera directors, stage managers, scene painters, and costumers are blithely indifferent to the verities of history. I have never seen a mimic reproduction of the church of St. Catherine on any stage; yet the church stands to-day with its walls intact as they were at the time in which the comedy is supposed to play. This time is fixed by the fact that its principal character, *Hans Sachs*, is represented as a widower who might himself be a suitor for *Eva's* hand. Now the veritable Sachs was a widower in the summer of the year 1560. I visited Nuremberg in 1886 in search of relics of the mastersingers and had no little difficulty in finding the church. It had not been put to its original purposes for more than a hundred years, and there seemed to be but few people in Nuremberg who knew of its existence. It

has been many things since it became secularized: a painter's academy, drawing-school, military hos-



THE CHURCH OF ST. CATHERINE IN NUREMBERG
(Sketched for the author by Louis Loeb in 1891)

pital, warehouse, concert-hall, and, no doubt, a score of other things. When I found it with the aid of

the police it was the paint-shop and scenic storeroom of the municipal theatre. It is a small building, utterly unpretentious of exterior and interior, innocent of architectural beauty, hidden away in the middle of a block of lowly buildings used as dwellings, carpenter shops, and the like. That Wagner never visited it is plain from the fact that though he makes it the scene of one act of his comedy (as he had to do to be historically accurate), his stage directions could not possibly be accommodated to its architecture. In 1891 Mr. Louis Loeb, the American artist, whose early death in the summer of 1909 is widely mourned, visited the spot and made drawings for me of the exterior and interior of the church as it looked then. The church was built in the last half decade of the thirteenth century, and on its water-stained walls, when I visited it, there were still to be seen faint traces of the frescoes which once adorned it and were painted in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries; but they were ruined beyond hope of restoration. In the Germanic Museum I found a wooden tablet dating back to 1581, painted by one Franz Hein. It preserves portraits of four distinguished members of the mastersingers' guild. There is a middle panel occupied by two pictures, the upper showing King David, the patron saint of the guild, so forgetful of chronology as to be praying before a crucifix, the lower a meeting of the mastersingers. Over the heads of the assemblage is a representative of the medallion with which the victor in a contest used to be decorated, as we see in

the last scene of Wagner's comedy. One of these decorations was given to the guild by Sachs and was in use for a whole century. At the end of that time it had become so worn that Wagenseil replaced it with another.

Church and tablet are the only relics of the mastersingers left in Nuremberg which may be called personal. I had expected to find autobiographic manuscripts of Sachs, but in this was disappointed. There is a volume of mastersongs in the poet-cobbler's handwriting in the Royal Library of Berlin, and one of these is the composition of the veritable Sixtus Beckmesser; but most of the Sachs manuscripts are in Zwickau. In the Bibliotheca Norica Williana, incorporated with the Municipal Library of Nuremberg, there are several volumes of mastersingers' songs purchased from an old mastersinger some 135 years ago, and from these the students may learn the structure and spirit of the mastersongs of the period of the opera as well as earlier and later periods, though he will find all the instruction he needs in any dozen or twenty of the 4275 mastersongs written by Hans Sachs. The manuscript books known serve to prove one thing which needed not to have called up a doubt. In them are poems from all of the mastersingers who make up the meeting which condemns *Walther* in St. Catherine's church. Wagner has adhered to the record.[1] The most inter-

[1] I quote from Wagenseil's book — he is writing about the history of the mastersingers: "Nach der Stadt Mäyntz, hat in den Stätten Nürnberg und Strassburg/ die Meister-Singer-Kunst

esting of Sixtus Beckmesser's compositions is "A New Year's Song," preserved in the handwriting of Sachs in the Royal Library at Berlin. This I have translated in order to show the form of the old mastersongs as described by the apprentice, *David*, in Wagner's comedy, and also to prove (so far as a somewhat free translation can) that the veritable Beckmesser was not the stupid dunce that Wagner, for purposes of his own, and tempted, doubtless, by the humor which he found in the name, represented him to be. In fact, I am strongly tempted to believe that with the exception of Sachs himself, Beckmesser was the best of the mastersingers of the Nuremberg school:—

A NEW YEAR'S SONG

By Sixtus Beckmesser

(*First "Stoll"*)

Joy
Christian thoughts employ
This day
Doth say
The Book of old
That we should hold
The faith foretold;
For naught doth doubt afford.
The patriarchs with one accord

sonderlich floriret/ wie dann auchXII. Alte Nürnbergische Meister annoch im Beruff sind; so mit Namen geheissen/ 1. Veit Pogner. 2. Cuntz Vogelgesang. 3. Hermann Ortel. 4. Conrad Nachtigal. 5. Fritz Zorn. 6. Sixtus Beckmesser. 7. Fritz Kohtner. 8. Niclaus Vogel. 9. Augustin Moser. 10. Hannss Schwartz. 11. Ulrich Eisslinger. 12. Hannss Foltz."

Lived hoping that the Lord
Would rout the wicked horde.
    Thus saith the word
    To all believers given.

(*Second "Stoll"*)

    God
Council held, triune,
When soon
The boon
    The son foresaw:
    Fulfilled the law
    That we might draw
Salvation's prize. God then
An angel sent cross moor and fen,
('Twas Gabriel, heaven's denizen,)
To Mary, purest maid 'mongst men.
    He greeted her
    With blessings sent from heaven.

(*The "Abgesang"*)

Thus spake the angel graciously:
    "The Lord with thee,
    Thou blessed she;
The Lord's voice saith,
Which breathes thy breath,
That men have earned eternal death.
    Faith
    Saves alone from sin's subjection;
    For while weak Eve God's anger waked,
'Twas, Ave, thine the blest election
To give the world peace and protection,
    Most blessed gift
    To mortals ever given!"

In Nuremberg the veritable Hans Sachs wrote plays on Tännhauser, Tristan, and Siegfried between three and four hundred years before the poet-composer who put the old cobbler-poet into his comedy. Very naïve and very archaic indeed are Hans Sachs's dramas compared with Wagner's; but it is, perhaps, not an exaggeration to say that Sachs was as influential a factor in the dramatic life of his time as Wagner in ours. He was among the earliest of the German poets who took up the miracle plays and mysteries after they had been abandoned by the church and developed them on the lines which ran out into the classic German drama. His immediate predecessors were the writers of the so-called "Fastnacht" (*Mardi-gras*) plays, who flourished in Nuremberg in the fifteenth century. Out of these plays German comedy arose, and among those who rocked its cradle was another of the mastersingers who plays a part in Wagner's opera, — Hans Folz. It was doubtless largely due to the influence of Hans Sachs that the guild of mastersingers built the first German theatre in Nuremberg in 1550. Before then plays with religious subjects were performed in St. Catherine's church, as we have seen, the meeting place of the guild. Secular plays were represented in private houses.

Hans Sachs wrote no less than 208 dramas, which he divided into "Carnival Plays," "Plays," "Comedies," and "Tragedies." He dropped the first designation in his later years, but his first dramatic effort was a *Fastnachtspiel*, and treated the subject

of Tannhäuser and Venus. It bears the date February 21, 1517, and was therefore written 296 years before Wagner was born. Of what is now dramatic form and structure, there is not a sign in this play. It is merely a dialogue between *Venus* and various persons who stand for as many classes of society. The title is: "Das Hoffgesindt Veneris," or, as it might be rendered in English, "The Court of Venus." The characters are a *Herald, Faithful Eckhardt, Danheuser* (*sic*), *Dame Venus*, a *Knight, Physician, Citizen, Peasant, Soldier, Gambler, Drunkard, Maid*, and *Wife*. The *Knight, Citizen*, and the others appear in turn before *Venus* and express contempt for her powers, — the *Knight* because of his bravery, the *Physician* because of his learning, the *Maid* because of her virtue, the *Wife* because of her honor. *Faithful Eckhardt*, a character that figures in many Thuringian legends, especially in tales of the Wild Hunt, warns each person in turn to beware of *Venus*. The latter listens to each boast and lets loose an arrow. Each boaster succumbs with a short lamentation. When the play opens, *Danheuser* is already a prisoner of the goddess. After all the rest have fallen victims, he begs for his release, and they join in his petition. Venus rejects the prayer, speaks in praise of her powers, and calls on a piper for music. A general dance follows, whereupon the company go with the enchantress into the Venusberg. The last speech of *Venus* ends with the line: —

So says Hans Sachs of Nuremberg.

There is but a single scene in "The Court of Venus." In other plays written in after years, no matter how often the action demanded it, there is neither change of scenes nor division into acts; and the personages, whether Biblical or classical, talk in the manner of the simple folk of the sixteenth century. Sachs's tragedy, "Von der strengen Lieb' Herrn Tristrant mit der schönen Königin Isalden" ("Of the strong love of Lord Tristram and the beautiful Queen Iseult"), contains seven acts, as is specified in the continuation of the title "und hat sieben Akte." It was written thirty-six years later than the carnival play and three years after the establishment of a theatre in Nuremberg by the mastersingers. Each act ends with a triple rhyme. Though Sachs uses stage directions somewhat freely compared with the other dramatists of the period, the personages all speak in the same manner, and time and space are annihilated in the action most bewilderingly. Thus, no sooner does *Herr Tristrant* volunteer to meet *Morhold der Held* to settle the question of "Curnewelshland's" tribute to "Irland" than the two are at it hammer and tongs on an island in the ocean. All the other incidents of the old legends follow as fast as they are mentioned. *Tristrant* saves his head in Ireland when discovered as the slayer of *Morhold* by ridding the country of a dragon, and is repeatedly convicted of treachery and taken back into confidence by *König Marx,* as one may read in Sir Thomas Malory's "Morte d'Arthur." Sachs follows an old conclusion of the story and

gives *Tristrant* a second *Iseult* to wife, and she tells the lie about the sails. The first *Iseult* dies of a broken heart at the sight of her lover's bier, and the *Herald* in a speech draws the moral of the tale:—

> Aus dem so lass dich treulich warnen,
> O Mensch, vor solcher Liebe Garnen,
> Und spar dein Lieb' bis in die Eh',
> Dann hab' Ein lieb' und keine meh.
> Diesselb' Lieb' ist mit Gott und Ehren,
> Die Welt damit fruchtbar zu mehren.
> Dazu giebt Gott selbst allewegen
> Sein' Gnad' Gedeihen und milden Segen.
> Dass stete Lieb' und Treu' aufwachs'
> Im ehlich'n Stand', das wünscht Hans Sachs.

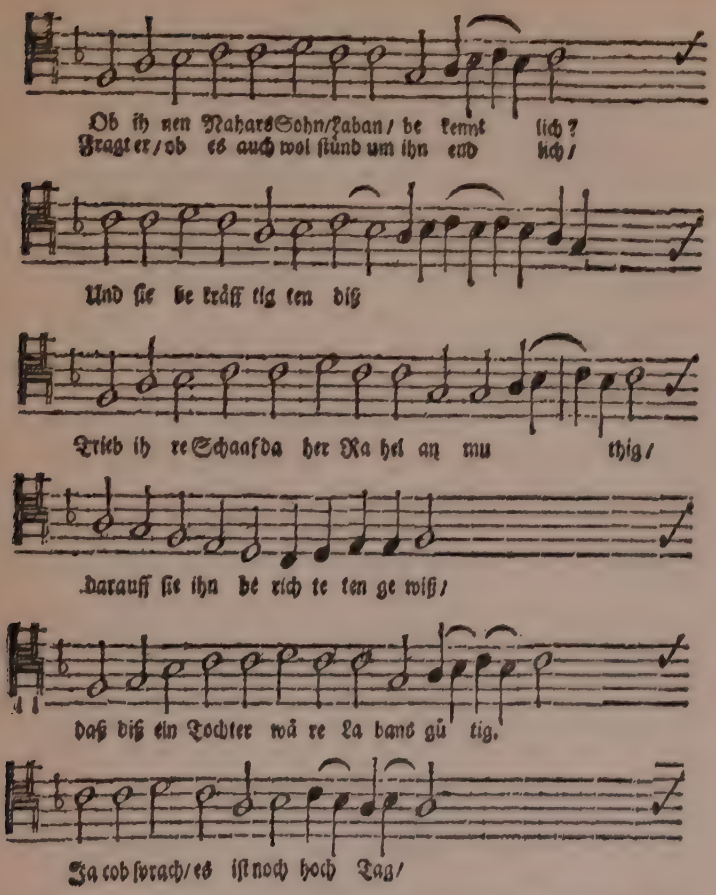
One of the most thrilling scenes in "Die Meistersinger" is the greeting of *Hans Sachs* by the populace when the hero enters with the mastersingers' guild at the festival of St. John (the chorus, "Wach auf! es nahet gen den Tag"). Here there is another illustration of Wagner's adherence to the verities of history, or rather, of his employment of them. The words of the uplifting choral song are not Wagner's, but were written by the old cobbler-poet himself. Wagner's stage people apply them to their idol, but Sachs uttered them in praise of Martin Luther; they form the beginning of his poem entitled "The Wittenberg Nightingale," which was printed in 1523.

To the old history of Nuremberg written by Wagenseil, Wagner went for other things besides the theatre and personages of his play. From it he got

the rules which governed the meeting of the mastersingers, like that which follows the religious service in the church of St. Catherine in the first act, and the singular names of the melodies to which, according to *David*, the candidates for mastersingers' honors were in the habit of improvising their songs. In one instance he made a draft on an authentic mastersinger melody. The march which is used throughout the comedy to symbolize the guild begins as follows: —

Here we have an exact quotation from the beginning of the first *Gesetz* in the "Long Tone" of Heinrich Müglin, which was a tune that every candidate for membership in the guild had to be able to sing. The old song is given in full in Wagenseil's book, and on the next page I have reproduced a portion of this song in *fac-simile*, so that my readers can observe the accuracy of Wagner's quotation and form an idea of the nature of the poetic frenzy which used to fill the mastersingers, as well as enjoy the ornamental passages (called "Blumen" in the old regulations) and compare them with the *fiorituri* of *Beckmesser's* serenade.

There is no doubt in my mind but that Wagner's purpose in "Die Meistersinger" was to celebrate the triumph of the natural, poetical impulse, stimulated by healthy emotion and communion with



Part of the "Meisterliche Hort" in Wagenseil's book on the Nuremberg Mastersingers, printed in 1697.

nature, over pedantry and hide-bound conservatism. In the larger study of the opera made in another place, I have attempted to show that the contest is in reality the one which is always waging between the principles of romanticism and classicism, a contest which is essentially friendly and necessary to progress. The hero of the comedy is not *Walther*, but *Sachs*, who represents in himself both principles, who stands between the combatants and checks the extravagances of both parties.[1]

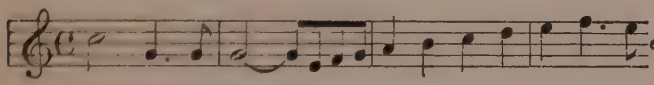
Like Beethoven in his "Leonore" overtures written for the opera "Fidelio," Wagner constructs the symphonic introduction to his comedy so as to indicate the elements of his dramatic story, their progress in the development of the play, and, finally, the outcome. The melodies are of two sorts conforming to the two parties into which the personages

[1] "In the musical contest it is only the perverted idea of Classicism which is treated with contumely and routed; the glorification of the triumph of Romanticism is found in the stupendously pompous and brilliant setting given to the mastersingers' music at the end. You see already in this prelude that Wagner is a true comedian. He administers chastisement with a smile and chooses for its subject only things which are temporary aberrations from the good. What is strong, and true, and pure, and wholesome in the art of the mastersingers he permits to pass through his satirical fires unscathed. Classicism, in its original sense as the conservator of that which is highest and best in art, he leaves unharmed, presenting her after her trial, as Tennyson presents his Princess at the close of his corrective poem, when

"All
Her falser self slipt from her like a robe,
And left her woman, lovelier in her mood
Than in her mould that other, when she came
From barren deeps to conquer all with love."

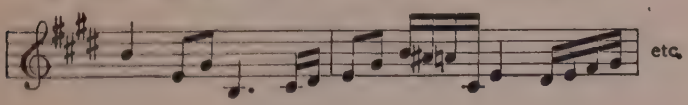
—"Studies in the Wagnerian Drama," by H. E. Krehbiel, p. 95.

of the play can be divided; and, like those parties, the melodies are broadly distinguished by external physiognomy and emotional essence. Most easily recognized are the two broad march tunes typical of the mastersingers and their pageantry. One of them has already been presented. Like its companion, —

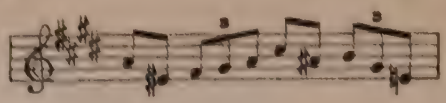


which opens the prelude, it is a strong, simple melody, made on the intervals of the diatonic scale, square-cut in rhythm, firm and dignified, and, like the mastersingers, complacent and a trifle pompous in stride. The three melodies which are presented in opposition to the spirit represented by the mastersingers and their typical music, are disclosed by a study of the comedy to be associated with the passion of the young lovers, *Walther* and *Eva*. They differ in every respect — melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic, — from those which stand for the old guildsmen and their rule-of-thumb notions. They are chromatic, as see this: —

and this (which is the melody which in a broadened form becomes that of *Walther's* prize song): —



and this, which is peculiarly the symbol of youthful ardor: —



Their rhythms are less regular and more eager (note the influence of syncopation upon them); they are harmonized with greater warmth and infused with greater passion. In the development of the prelude these melodies are presented at first consecutively, then as in conflict (first one, then another pushing forward for expression), finally in harmonious and contented union. The middle part of the prelude, in which the opening march tune is heard in short, quick notes (in diminution, as the theoreticians say) may be looked upon as caricaturing the mastersingers, not in their fair estate, but as they are satirized in the comedy in the person of *Beckmesser*.

CHAPTER XVI

"LOHENGRIN"

In the last hundred lines of the last book of his epic poem to which Wagner went for the fundamental incidents, not principles, of his "Parsifal," Wolfram von Eschenbach tells the story of one of the Grail King's sons whom he calls Loherangrin. This son was a lad when Parzival (thus Wolfram spells the name) became King of the Holy Grail and the knights who were in its service. When he had grown to manhood, there lived in Brabant a queen who was equally gifted in beauty, wealth, and gentleness. Many princes sought her hand in marriage, but she refused them all, and waited for the coming of one whom God had disclosed to her in a vision. One day a knight of great beauty and nobley, as Sir Thomas Mallory would have said, came to Antwerp in a boat drawn by a swan. To him the queen at once gave greeting as lord of her dominions; but in the presence of the assembled folk he said to her: "If I am to become ruler of this land, know that it will be at great sacrifice to myself. Should you nevertheless wish me to remain with you, you must never ask who I am; otherwise I must leave you forever." The queen made solemn protestation that

she would never do aught against his will. Then her marriage with the stranger knight was celebrated, and they abode together long in happiness and honor. But at the last the queen was led to put the fatal question. Then the swan appeared with the boat, and Loherangrin, for it was he, was drawn back to Montsalvat, whence he had come. But to those whom he left behind he gave his sword, horn, and ring.

There are other mediæval poems which deal with the story of Lohengrin, more, indeed, than can or need be discussed here. Some, however, deserve consideration because they supply elements which Wagner used in his opera but did not find in Wolfram's poem. Wagner went, very naturally, to a poem of the thirteenth century, entitled "Lohengrin," for the majority of the incidents of the drama. Thence he may have drawn the motive for the curiosity of *Elsa* touching the personality of her husband. Of course, it lies in human nature, as stories which are hundreds if not thousands of years older attest; but I am trying, as I have been in preceding chapters in this book, to account for the presence of certain important elements in Wagner's opera, and so this poem must also be considered. In it Lohengrin rescues Elsa, the Duchess of Brabant, from the false accusations of Telramund, the knight having been summoned from Montsalvat (or "Monsalväsch," to be accurate) by the ringing of a bell which Elsa had taken from a falcon's leg. The knight marries her, but first exacts a promise that she will never seek of him

knowledge of his race or country. After the happy domestic life of the pair has been described, it is told how Lohengrin overthrew the Duke of Cleves at a tournament in Cologne and broke his arm. The Duchess of Cleves felt humiliated at the overthrow of her husband by a knight of whom nothing was known, and wickedly insinuated that it was a pity that so puissant a jouster should not be of noble birth, thereby instilling a fatal curiosity into the mind of the Lady of Brabant, which led to questions which Lohengrin answered before the emperor's court and then disappeared from view. From "Der jüngere Titurel," another mediæval poem, came the suggestion that the mysterious knight's prowess was due to sorcery and might be set at naught if his bodily integrity were destroyed even in the slightest degree. In the French tale of "Le Chevalier au Cygne," as told in the "Chansons de geste," you may read the story of Helyas, who was one of seven children of King Oriant and Queen Beatrix, who were born with silver chains around their necks. The chains being removed with evil purpose, the children turned into swans and flew away — all but one, Helyas, who was absent at the time. But Helyas got possession of all the chains but one, which had been wrought into a cup, and one day, when he heard the sound of wings, and six swans let themselves down into the water, he threw the chains around their necks, and they at once assumed the forms of his brothers. Also how, one day, Helyas, from the window of his palace, saw a swan drawing a boat,

and how he donned his armor, took a golden horn, and was drawn away to Nimwegen, where Emperor Otto was holding court. There he found that the Count of Blankenbourg had accused his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Bouillon, of having poisoned her husband, and had laid claim to the duchy. There was to be a trial by ordeal of battle, and while the duchess waited for the coming of a champion, lo! there was the sound of a horn, and Helyas came down the river in a boat drawn by a swan, undertook the cause of the innocent lady, slew her accuser, and married her daughter. For long she was a good and faithful wife, and bore him a child who became the mother of Godfrey de Bouillon, Baldwin de Sebourg, and Eustace de Boulogne. But one day she asked of her lord his name and race. Then he bade her repair to Nimwegen, and commending her and her daughter to the care of the emperor, he departed thence in a swan-drawn boat and was never seen more.

Here we have the essentials of the story which Wagner wrought into his opera "Lohengrin." Only a few details need be added to make the plot complete. The meeting of *Lohengrin* and *Elsa* takes place on the banks of the river Scheldt in Brabant. The *King* has come to ask the help of the Brabantians against the Huns, who are invading Germany. He finds Brabant in a disturbed state. The throne is vacant; *Count Frederick of Telramund*, who has his eyes upon it, had offered his hand in marriage to *Elsa*, who, with her brother, *Gottfried*, had been left in his care on the death of their father, but had met

with a refusal. He had then married *Ortrud*, a Frisian princess. She is the last of a royal line, but a pagan, and practises sorcery. To promote the ambition of herself and her husband, she has changed *Gottfried* into a swan by throwing a magical chain about his neck, and persuaded *Telramund* to accuse *Elsa* of having murdered the boy in the hope of enjoying the throne together with a secret lover. The *King* summons *Elsa* to answer the charge and decrees trial by ordeal of battle. Commanded to name her champion, she tells of a knight seen in a dream: upon him alone will she rely. Not until the second call of the *Herald* has gone out and *Elsa* has fallen to her knees in prayer does the champion appear. He is a knight in shining white armor who comes in a boat drawn by a swan. He accepts the gage of battle, after asking *Elsa* whether or not she wants him to be her husband if victorious in the combat, and exacting a promise never to ask of him whence he came or what his name or race. He overcomes *Telramund*, but gives him his life; the *King*, however, banishes the false accuser and sets the stranger over the people of Brabant with the title of Protector. *Telramund* is overwhelmed by his misfortunes, but *Ortrud* urges him to make another trial to regain what he has lost. The knight, she says, had won by witchcraft, and if but the smallest joint of his body could be taken from him, he would be impotent. Together they instil disquiet and suspicion into the mind of *Elsa* as she is about to enter the minster to be married. After the wedding guests have departed, her newly found

happiness is disturbed by doubt, and a painful curiosity manifests itself in her speech. *Lohengrin* admonishes, reproves, and warns in words of tenderest love. He had given up greater glories than his new life had to offer out of love for her. A horrible fear seizes her: he who had so mysteriously come would as mysteriously depart. Cost what it may, she must know who he is. She asks the question, but before he can reply *Telramund* rushes into the room with drawn weapon. *Elsa* has but time to hand *Lohengrin* his sword, with which he stretches the would-be assassin dead on the chamber floor. Then he commands that the body be carried before the *King*, whither he also directs her maids to escort his wife. There is another conclave of *King* and nobles. *Lohengrin* asks if he had acted within his right in slaying *Telramund*, and his deed is approved by all. Then he gives public answer to *Elsa's* question:

In distant lands, where ye can never enter,
A castle stands and Montsalvat its name;
A radiant temple rises from its centre
More glorious far than aught of earthly fame.
And there a vessel of most wondrous splendor,
A shrine, most holy, guarded well doth rest,
To which but mortals purest service render —
'Twas brought to earth by hosts of angels blest!
Once every year a dove from heaven descendeth
To strengthen then its wondrous powers anew:
'Tis called the Grail — and purest faith it lendeth
To those good knights who are its chosen few.
To serve the Grail whoe'er is once elected
Receives from it a supernatural might;
From baneful harm and fraud is he protected,

Away from him flees death and gloom of night!
Yea, whom by it to distant lands is bidden
As champion to some virtuous cause maintain,
Well knows its powers are from him never hidden,
If, as its knight, he unrevealed remain.
Such wondrous nature is the Grail's great blessing,
Reveal'd must then the knight from mortals flee:
Let not rest in your hearts a doubt oppressing, —
If known to you he saileth o'er the sea.
Now list what he to you in troth declareth:
The Grail obeying here to you I came.
My father Parzival, a crown he weareth,
His knight am I and Lohengrin my name![1]

A prohibition which rests upon all who are served by a Knight of the Grail having been violated, he must depart from thence; but before going he gives his sword, horn, and ring to *Elsa*, and tells her that had he been permitted to live but one year at her side, her brother would have returned in conduct of the Grail. The swan appears to convey him back to his resplendent home. *Ortrud* recognizes the chain around its neck and gloats over her triumph; but *Lohengrin* hears her shout. He sinks on his knees in silent prayer. As he rises, a white dove floats downward toward the boat. *Lohengrin* detaches the chain from the neck of the swan. The bird disappears, and in its place stands *Gottfried*, released from the spell put upon him by the sorceress. The dove draws the boat with its celestial passenger away, and *Elsa* sinks lifeless into the arms of her brother.

In this story of *Lohengrin* there is an admixture of

[1] John P. Jackson's translation.

several elements which once had no association. It is the story of an adventure of a Knight of the Holy Grail; also a story involving the old principle of taboo; and one of many stories of the transformation of a human being into a swan, or a swan into a human being. This swan myth is one of the most widely spread of all transformation tales; it may even be found in the folk-stories of the American Indians. To discuss this feature would carry one too far afield, and I have a different purpose in view.

* * *

The two Figaro operas, the discussion of which opened this book, were composed by different men, and a generation of time separated their production. The opera which deals with the second chapter of the adventures of Seville's factotum was composed first, and is the greater work of the two; yet we have seen how pleasantly they can be associated with each other, and, no doubt, many who admire them have felt with me the wish that some musician with sufficient skill and the needful reverence would try the experiment of remodelling the two and knitting their bonds closer by giving identity of voice to the personages who figure in both. The Wagnerian list presents something like a parallel, and it would be a pleasant thing if two of the modern poet-composer's dramas which have community of subject could be brought into similar association, so that one might be performed as a sequel to the other. The operas are "Lohengrin" and "Parsifal." A generation also

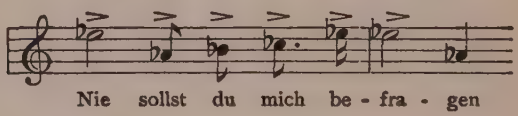
lies between them, and they ought to bear a relationship to each other something like that existing between "Le Nozze di Figaro" and "Il Barbiere di Siviglia." Indeed, the bond ought to be closer, for one man wrote books and music as well of the Grail dramas, whereas different librettists and different composers created the Figaro comedies. But it will never be possible to bring Wagner's most popular opera and his "stage-consecrating play" into logical union, notwithstanding that both deal with the legend of the Holy Grail and that the hero of one proclaims himself to be the son of the hero of the other. Wagner cast a loving glance at the older child of his brain when he quoted some of the "swan music" of "Lohengrin" in "Parsifal"; but he built an insurmountable wall between them when he forsook the sane and simple ideas which inspired him in writing "Lohengrin" for the complicated fabric of mediæval Christianity and Buddhism which he strove to set forth in "Parsifal." In 1847 Wagner was willing to look at the hero of the quest of the Holy Grail whom we call Percival through the eyes of his later guide, Wolfram von Eschenbach. To Wolfram Parzival was a married man; more than that — a married lover, clinging with devotion to the memory of the wife from whose arms he had torn himself to undertake the quest, and losing himself in tender brooding for days when the sight of blood-spots on the snow suggested to his fancy the red and white of fair Konwiramur's cheeks. Thirty years later Wagner could only conceive of his

Grail hero as a celibate and an ascetic. *Lohengrin* glories in the fact that he is the son of him who wears the crown of the Grail; but *Parsifal* disowns his son.

This is one instance of the incoherency of the two Grail dramas. There is another, and by this second departure from the old legends which furnished forth his subject, Wagner made "Lohengrin" and "Parsifal" forever irreconcilable. The whole fabric of the older opera rests on the forbidden question: —

> Nie sollst du mich befragen,
> noch Wissen's Sorge tragen,
> woher ich kam der Fahrt,
> noch wie mein Nam' und Art.[1]

So impressed was Wagner with the significance of this dramatic motive sixty years ago, that he gave it a musical setting which still stands as the finest of all his many illustrations of the principle of fundamental or typical phrases in dramatic music: —



And no wonder. No matter where he turned in his studies of the Grail legend, he was confronted by the fact that it was by asking a question that the seeker

[1] In Mr. John P. Jackson's translation: —

> Ne'er with thy fears shalt task me,
> Nor questions idly ask me:
> The land and from whence I came,
> Nor yet my race and name.

after the Grail was to release the ailing king, whom he found in the castle in which the talismans were preserved, from his sufferings. In the Welsh tale of Peredur and the French romances the question went only to the meaning of the talismans; but this did not suffice Wolfram von Eschenbach, who in many ways raised the ethical standard of the Grail legend. He changed the question so as to make it a sign of affectionate and compassionate interest on the part of the questioner; it was no longer, "What mean the bloody head and the bleeding lance?" but "What ails thee, uncle?"

Wagner was fond, a little overfond, indeed, of appealing to the public over the heads of the critics, of going to the jury rather than the judge, when asking for appreciation of his dramas; but nothing is plainer to the close student than that he was never wholly willing to credit the public with possession of that high imaginativeness to which his dramas more than those of any other composer make appeal. His first conception of the finale of "Tannhäuser," for instance, was beautiful, poetical, and reasonable; for the sake of a spectacle he reconstructed it after the original production and plunged it into indefensible confusion and absurdity.

A desire to abstain as much as possible from criticism (that not being the purpose of this book) led me to avoid mention of this circumstance in the exposition of "Tannhäuser"; but I find that I must now set it forth, though briefly. In the original form of the opera there was no funeral procession

and no death of the hero beside the bier of the atoning saint. The scene between *Tannhäuser* and *Wolfram* was interrupted by the tolling of a bell in the castle to indicate the death of *Elizabeth* and the appearance of a glow of rose-colored light across the valley to suggest the presence of *Venus*. By bringing the corpse of *Elizabeth* on the stage so that *Tannhäuser* might die by its side, Wagner was guilty of worse than an anachronism. The time which elapses in the drama between *Elizabeth's* departure from the scene and her return as a corpse is just as long as the song which *Wolfram* sings in which he apostrophizes her as his "holder Abendstern" — just as long and not a moment longer. There is no question here of poetical license, for *Wolfram* sings the apostrophe after her retreating figure, and the last chord of his postlude is interrupted by *Tannhäuser's* words, "Ich hörte Harfenschlag!" Yet we are asked to assume that in the brief interim *Elizabeth* has ascended the mountain to the Wartburg, died, been prepared for burial, and brought back to the valley as the central object of a stately funeral.

It would have been much wiser to have left the death of *Elizabeth* to the imagination of the public than to have made the scene ridiculous. But Wagner was afraid to do that, lest his purpose be overlooked. He was a master of theatrical craft, and though he could write a tragedy like "Tristan und Isolde," with little regard for external action, he was quite unwilling to miss so effective a theatrical effect

as the death of *Tannhäuser* beside *Elizabeth's* bier. After all, he did not trust the public, whose judgment he affected to place above that of his critics, and for this reason, while he was willing to call up memories of his earlier opera by quoting some of its music in "Parsifal," he ignored the question which plays so important a rôle in "Lohengrin," and made the healing of *Amfortas* depend upon a touch of the talismanic spear — a device which came into the Grail story from pagan sources, as I have already pointed out.

Now, why was the questioning of *Lohengrin* forbidden? Wolfram von Eschenbach tells us, and his explanation sufficed Wagner when he made his first studies of the Grail legends as a preparation for "Lohengrin." It was the Holy Grail itself which pronounced the taboo. An inscription appeared on the talisman one day commanding that whenever a Knight of the Grail went into foreign lands to assume rule over a people, he was to admonish them not to question him concerning his name and race; should the question be put, he was to leave them at once. And the reason?

> Weil der gute Amfortas
> So lang in bittern Schmerzen lag,
> Und ihn die Frage lange mied,
> Ist ihnen alles Fragen leid;
> All des Grales Dienstgesellen
> Wollen sich nicht mehr fragen lassen.

The same explanation is made in the mediæval poem "Lohengrin." We are not called upon to

admire the logic of Wolfram and the Knights of the Grail, but nothing could be plainer than this: The sufferings of Amfortas having been wofully prolonged by Parzival's failure to ask the healing question, the Knights of the Grail were thereafter required by their oracular guide to prohibit all questioning of themselves under penalty of forfeiture of their puissant help. When Wagner wrote his last drama, he was presented with a dilemma: should he remain consistent and adhere to the question as a dramatic motive, or dare the charge of inconsistency for the sake of that bit of spectacular apparatus, the sacred lance? He chose inconsistency and the show, and emphasized the element of relic worship to such a degree as to make his drama foreign to the intellectual and religious habits of the time in which he wrote. But this did not disturb him; for he knew that beauty addresses itself to the emotions rather than the intellect, and that his philosophical message of the redeeming power of loving compassion would find entrance to the hearts of the people over all the obstacles that reason might interpose. Yet he destroyed all the poetical bonds which ought or might have existed between "Parsifal" and "Lohengrin."

It was Wagner who created the contradiction which puts his operas in opposition by his substitution of the sacred lance as a dramatic motive for the question. But poets had long before taken the privilege of juggling with two elements of ancient myths and folk-tales which are blended in the story of Lohengrin. Originally there was no relationship

between the Knight of the Holy Grail and the Swan Knight, and there is no telling when the fusion of the tales was made. But the element of the forbidden question is of unspeakable antiquity and survives in the law of taboo which exists among savages to-day. When Wagner discussed his opera in his "Communication to My Friends" he pointed out the resemblance between the story of Lohengrin and the myth of Zeus and Semele. Its philosophical essence he proclaimed to be humanity's feeling of the necessity of love. Elsa was "the woman who drew Lohengrin from the sunny heights to the depths of earth's warm heart. . . . Thus yearned he for woman — for the human heart. And thus did he step down from out his loneliness of sterile bliss when he heard this woman's cry for succor, this heart cry from humanity below." This is all very well, and it would be churlish to say that it is not beautifully reflected in Wagner's drama; but it does not explain the need of the prohibition. A woman who loves must have unquestioning faith in her husband — that is all. But there are two ancient myths which show that the taboo was conceived as a necessary ingredient of the association of divine men with human women. Let both be recalled, for both have plainly gone over into the mediæval story.

The first is the one to which Wagner made allusion: Jupiter has given his love to Semele. Wickedly prompted by the jealous Juno, Semele asks her august lover to grant her a wish. He promises that

she shall have her desire, and confirms his words with the irrevocable oath, swearing by the Stygian flood. Semele asks him then to appear to her in all his celestial splendor. The god would have stopped her when he realized her purpose, but it was too late. Sorrowfully he returned to the celestial abode and fearfully he put on his lesser panoply. Arrayed in this he entered the chamber of Semele, but though he had left behind him the greater splendors, the immortal radiance consumed her to ashes.

That is one story; the other is the beautiful fable, freighted with ethical symbolism, which Apuleius gave to literature in the second century of the Christian era, though, no doubt, his exquisite story is only the elaboration of a much older conceit. Psyche, the daughter of a king, arouses the envy of Venus because of her beauty, and the goddess's anger because of the feeling which that beauty inspires among men. She resolves to punish her presumptuous mortal rival, and sends Cupid as her messenger of vengeance. But the God of Love falls himself a victim to the maiden's charms. The spell which he puts upon her he cannot wholly dissipate. Hosts of admirers still follow Psyche, but no worthy man offers her marriage. Her parents consult the oracle of Apollo, who tells him that she is doomed to become the wife of a monster who lives upon a high mountain. The maiden sees in this a punishment meted out by Venus and offers herself as a propitiatory sacrifice. Left alone by parents and friends, she climbs the rocky steeps and falls asleep

in the wilderness. Thither come the Zephyrs and carry her to a beautiful garden, where unseen hands serve her sumptuously in a magnificent palace and the voices of invisible singers ravish her ears with music. Every night she is visited by a mysterious being who lavishes loving gifts upon her, but forbids her to look upon his face, and disappears before dawn. Psyche's sisters, envious of her good fortune and great happiness, fill her mind with wicked doubt and distrust. A fatal curiosity seizes upon her, and one night she uncovers her lamp to look upon the form of her doting companion. Instead of the monster spoken of by the oracle, she sees the loveliest of the immortals. It is Cupid who lies sleeping before her, with snowy wings folded, and golden ringlets clustering about his shoulders. Anxious for a closer view, Psyche leans over him, but a drop of hot oil falls from the lamp upon his shining skin. The god awakes, and without a word flies out of the window. Palace and garden disappear, and Psyche is left alone to suffer the consequences of her foolish curiosity. After wandering long in search of the lost one, she wins the sympathy of Ceres, who advises her to seek out Venus and offer reparation. She becomes the slave of the goddess, who imposes cruel tasks upon her. But at length Cupid can no longer endure to be separated from her, and goes to Jupiter, who intercedes with Venus and wins her forgiveness for Psyche. Then the supreme god gives her immortality, and she becomes forever the wife of Cupid.

There are two other points, one legendary, one

historical, which ought to be mentioned for the sake of those who like to know the sources of stories like that of Lohengrin. The ancient Angles had a saga which told of the arrival in their country of a boat, evidently sailless, oarless, and rudderless, containing only a child surrounded by arms and treasure. They brought him up and called him Skéaf (from which word our "sheaf"), because he lay upon a bundle of grain. He became king of the people, and, when he felt death upon him, commanded to be carried back to the shore where he had been found. There lay the boat in which he had come, and when his dead body was placed in it, it moved away of its own accord. From him descended a race of kings. Here, I am inclined to see a survival of the story of Danaë and her child Perseus found floating on the sea in a chest, as sung by Simonides. The historical element in "Lohengrin" is compassed by the figure of the king, who metes out justice melodiously in the opening and closing scenes. It is King Henry I of Germany, called the Fowler, who reigned from A.D. 918 to 936. He was a wise, brave, and righteous king, who fought the savage Huns, and for his sake the management of the festival performances at Bayreuth, in 1894, introduced costumes of the tenth century.

CHAPTER XVII

"HÄNSEL UND GRETEL"

In many respects "Hänsel und Gretel" is the most interesting opera composed since "Parsifal," and, by being an exception, proves the rule to which I directed some remarks in the chapter on "Don Giovanni." For a quarter of a century the minds of musical critics and historians have been occupied at intervals with the question whether or not progress in operatic composition is possible on the lines laid down by Wagner. Of his influence upon all the works composed within a period twice as long there never was a doubt; but this influence manifested itself for the greater part in modifications of old methods rather than the invention of new. In Germany attempts have been made over and over again to follow Wagner's system, but though a few operas thus produced have had a temporary success, in the end it has been found that the experiments have all ended in failures. It was but natural that the fact should provoke discussion. If no one could write successfully in Wagner's manner, was there a future for the lyric drama outside of a return to the style which he had striven to overthrow? If there was no such future, was the fact not proof of

the failure of the Wagnerian movement as a creative force? The question was frequently answered in a spirit antagonistic to Wagner; but many of the answers were overhasty and short-sighted. It needed only that one should come who had thoroughly assimilated Wagner's methods and had the genius to apply them in a spirit of individuality, to demonstrate that it was possible to continue the production of lyric dramas without returning to the hackneyed manner of the opposing school. The composer who did this was Engelbert Humperdinck, and it is particularly noteworthy that his demonstration acquired its most convincing force from the circumstance that instead of seeking his material in the myths of antiquity, as Wagner did, he found them in the nursery.

While emphasizing this fact, however, it is well not to forget that in turning to the literature of folklore for an operatic subject Humperdinck was only carrying out one of the principles for which Wagner contended. The *Mährchen* of a people are quite as much a reflex of their intellectual, moral, and emotional life as their heroic legends and myths. In fact, they are frequently only the fragments of stories which, when they were created, were embodiments of the most profound and impressive religious conceptions of which the people were capable. The degeneration of the sun god of our Teutonic forefathers into the Hans of Grimm's tale, who could not learn to shiver and shake, through the Sinfiotle of the "Volsunga Saga" and the Sieg-

fried of the "Nibelungenlied," is so obvious that it needs no commentary. Neither should the translation of Brynhild into Dornröschen, the Sleeping Beauty of our children's tales. The progress illustrated in these examples is that from myth to *Mährchen*, and Humperdinck in writing his fairy opera, or nursery opera if you will, paid tribute to German nationality in the same coin that Wagner did when he created his "Ring of the Nibelung." Everything about "Hänsel und Gretel" is charming to those who can feel their hearts warm toward the family life and folklore of Germany, of which we are, or ought to be, inheritors. The opera originated, like Thackeray's delightful fireside pantomime for great and small children, "The Rose and the Ring." The composer has a sister, Frau Adelheid Wette, wife of a physician in Cologne. She, without any particular thought of literary activity, had been in the habit of writing little plays for production within the family circle. For these plays her brother provided the music. In this way grew the first dramatic version of the story of Hänsel and Gretel, which, everybody who has had a German nurse or has read Grimm's fairy tales knows, tells the adventures of two children, a brother and sister, who, driven into the woods, fell into the toils of the Crust Witch (*Knusperhexe*), who enticed little boys and girls into her house, built of gingerbread and sweetmeats, and there ate them up. The original performers of the principal characters in the play were the daughters of Frau Wette. Charmed

with the effect of the fanciful little comedy, Herr Humperdinck suggested its expansion into a piece of theatrical dimensions; and the opera was the result. It was brought forward for the first time in public on December 23, 1893, in Weimar, and created so profound an impression that it speedily took possession of all the principal theatres of Germany, crossed the channel into England, made its way into Holland, Belgium, and Italy, and reached America within two years. Its first performance in New York was in an English version at Daly's Theatre on October 8, 1895. There were drawbacks in the representation which prevented a success, but after it had been incorporated in the German repertory of the Metropolitan Opera-house in the season of 1895–1896 it became as much of a permanency as any opera in the list.

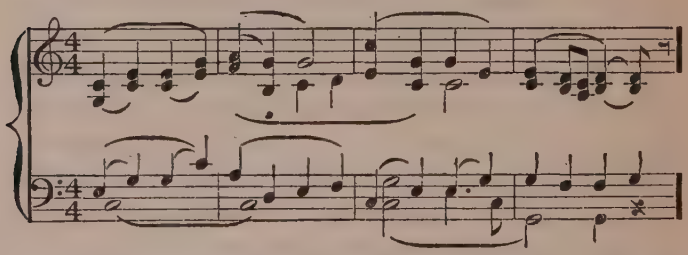
Humperdinck has built up the musical structure of "Hänsel und Gretel" in the Wagnerian manner, but has done it with so much fluency and deftness that a musical layman might listen to it from beginning to end without suspecting the fact, save from the occasional employment of what may be called Wagnerian idioms. The little work is replete with melodies which, though original, bear a strong family resemblance to two little songs which the children sing at the beginning of the first and second acts, and which are veritable nursery songs in Germany. These ditties and the principal melodies consorted with them contribute characteristic *motifs* out of which the orchestral part is constructed;

and these *motifs* are developed in accordance with an interrelated scheme every bit as logical and consistent as the scheme at the bottom of "Tristan und Isolde." As in that stupendous musical tragedy, the orchestra takes the part played by the chorus in Greek tragedy, so in "Hänsel und Gretel" it unfolds the thoughts, motives, and purposes of the personages of the play and lays bare the simple mysteries of the plot and counterplot. The careless happiness of the children, the apprehension of the parents, promise and fulfilment, enchantment and disenchantment — all these things are expounded by the orchestra in a fine flood of music, highly ingenious in contrapuntal texture, rich in instrumental color, full of rhythmical life, on the surface of which the idyllic play floats buoyantly, like a water-lily which

> starts and slides
> Upon the level in little puffs of wind,
> Tho' anchored to the bottom.

It is necessary, because the music is so beautiful and also because the piece, like the "Leonore" overtures of Beethoven and the "Meistersinger" prelude of Wagner (of which, indeed, it is a pretty frank imitation) is a sort of epitome of the play, to spend some time with the prelude to "Hänsel und Gretel." After I have done this I shall say what I have to say about the typical phrases of the score as they are reached, and shall leave to the reader the agreeable labor of discovering the logical scheme underlying their introduction and development.

The prelude is built out of a few themes which are associated with some of the most significant elements of the play. Not one of them is a personal label, as is widely, but erroneously, supposed to be the case in Wagner's dramas. They stand for dramatic ideas and agencies, and when these are passed in review, as it is purposed shall be done presently, it will be found that not the sinister but the amiable features of the story have been chosen for celebration in the overture. Here, too, in what may be called the ethical meaning of the prelude, Humperdinck has followed the example of Wagner in the prelude to his comedy. Simply for the sake of identification hereafter names will be attached to the themes out of which the prelude is constructed and which come from the chief melodic factors of the opera. The most important of these is the melody sung by the horns at the beginning:—

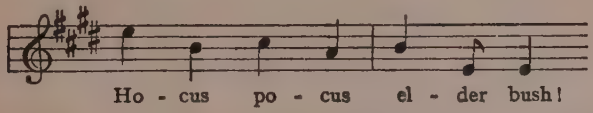


Let it be called the "Prayer Theme," for the melody is that of the prayer which the little ones utter before laying themselves down to sleep in the wood. The melody seems to be associated throughout the opera with the idea of divine guardianship,

and is first heard in the first scene, when *Hänsel*, having complained of hunger, *Gretel* gently chides him and holds out comfort in the words (here I use the English version of the opera): —

> When past bearing is our grief
> God, the Lord, will send relief.

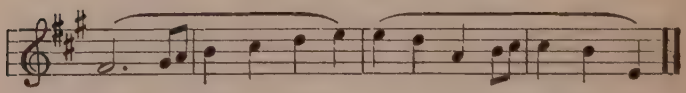
Humperdinck's splendid contrapuntal skill shows itself in a most varied use of this theme. Once in the prelude it appears in three different forms simultaneously, and in an augmented shape it forms the substratum of the prelude, while other themes are cunningly woven above it. The second theme is an exceedingly bright and energetic little phrase with which the rapid portion of the prelude begins. It shall be called the "Counter-Charm" theme, because it is the melodic phrase which serves as a formula with which the spell which the witch puts upon her victims is released by her as well as by the children who overhear it. When it occurs in the play it has this form: —



Words and music come from the mouth of *Gretel* when she releases *Hänsel* from the spell in the third act, and from that of *Hänsel* when he performs the same office for the gingerbread children. After two phrases of minor significance there comes the "Theme of Fulfilment," so called because of its association with the answer to the prayer for pro-

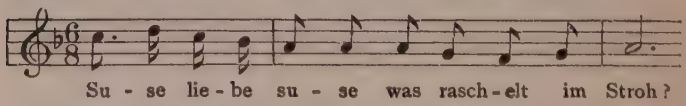
tection in the woods. Thus it forms part of the dawn music at the beginning of the third act when the children are awakened by the *Dewman*. It makes up the original part of the song of this *Dawn Fairy* and is the melody to which *Hänsel* and *Gretel* sing their explanation to the wondering gingerbread children: —

The angels whispered in dreams to us in silent night
What this happy day has brought to light.



There is a fourth theme, the "Theme of Rejoicing," which is the inspiration of the dance which the gingerbread children execute around *Hänsel* and *Gretel* to celebrate their release from the enchantment put upon them by the wicked *Witch*.

At the parting of the curtain we see the interior of the hut of a poor broom-maker. Specimens of his handiwork hang upon the walls. A tiny window beside the door in the background shows a glimpse of the forest beyond. *Hänsel* and *Gretel* are at work, he making brooms, she knitting. *Gretel* sings an old German folk-song, beginning thus: —



All the melodies in this act have a strong family resemblance, but this song, a cradle song of the long ago, is the only one not composed by Hum-

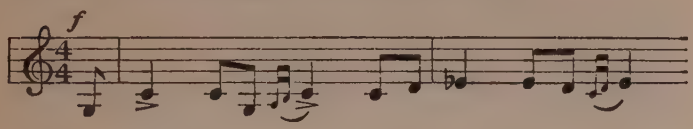
perdinck. Miss Constance Bache has failed, in her English translation, to reproduce the quaint sentiment of the old song, which calls attention to the fact that all geese are shoeless. It is not for want of leather, — the shoemaker has that in plenty, — but he has no lasts, and so the poor things must needs go barefoot. The song invites a curious historical note. "Suse" and "Sause" were common expressions in the cradle songs which used to be sung to the Christ-child in the German churches at Christmas when the decadent nativity plays (now dwarfed to a mere tableau of the manger, the holy parents, and the adoring shepherds and magi) were still cultivated. From the old custom termed *Kindelwiegen*, which remained in the German Protestant Church centuries after the Reformation, Luther borrowed the refrain, "Susaninne" for one of his Christmas chorales. The beginning of the little song which *Gretel* sings used to be "Sause liebe Ninne," which, of course, is Luther's "Susaninne." The song dominates the whole of the first act. Out of portions of its melody grows a large part of the instrumental accompaniment to the melodious recitative in which the dialogue is carried on. Through expressive changes, not only in this act, but later also, it provides a medium for much dramatic expression. A little *motif* with which the orchestra introduces it develops into a song, with which *Hänsel* greets his sister's announcement that a neighbor has sent in some milk, and when *Gretel*, as soon as she does, attempts to teach *Hänsel* how to dance, the delight-

ful little polka tune which the two sing is almost a twin brother to the cradle song.

It is the gift of milk which directly brings the sinister element into the play. The mother comes home weary, hungry, and out of humor. She finds that the children have neglected their work, and while attempting to punish them she overturns the milk jug. It is the last straw, and, with threats of a terrible beating if they do not bring home a heaping basket of berries for supper, she drives the little ones out into the forest. Exhausted, she falls asleep beside the hearth. From the distance comes the voice of the broom-maker trolling a song which is now merry, now sad. He enters his hut in great good humor, however, for he has sold all his wares and comes with his basket loaded with good things to eat and no inconsiderable quantity of kümmel in his stomach. Till now, save for the few moments which followed the entrance of the mother, the music has echoed nothing but childish joy. All this is changed, however, when the father, inquiring after his children, learns that they have gone into the woods. He tells his wife the legend of the *Witch* of the Ilsenstein and her dreadful practices, while the orchestra builds up a gruesome picture out of fragments from the innocent song which had opened the act. Fearful for the fate of her children, the mother dashes into the forest, followed by the broom-maker.

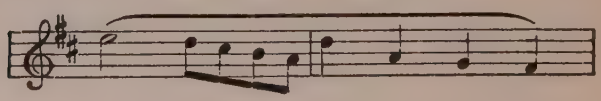
A musical delineation of a witch's ride separates the first and second acts. It is a garishly colored

composition beginning with a pompous proclamation of the "Theme of the Witch":—



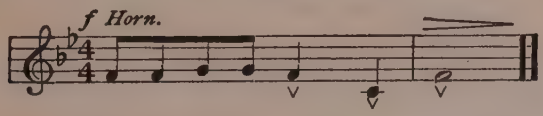
This is interwoven with echoes from the song of the broom-maker, and, as might be expected, a great deal of chromatic material, such as seems indispensable in musical pictures of the supernatural. Towards the close the weird elements gradually disappear and give way to a peaceful forest mood, pervaded by a long-drawn melody from the trumpet, accompanied by sounds suggestive of the murmuring of trees. The parting of the curtain discovers a scene in the depths of the woods. *Gretel* sits under a large tree weaving a garland of flowers. *Hänsel* is picking strawberries. The sun is setting. *Gretel* sings another folk-song, the meaning of which is lost to those who are unfamiliar with the song in the original. It is a riddle of the German nursery: "A little man stands in the forest, silent and alone, wearing a purplish red mantle. He stands on one leg, and wears a little black cap. Who is the little man?" Answer:—the *Hagebutte; i.e.* the rose apple, fruit of the rose tree. After the *Witch's* ride, nothing could be more effective in restoring the ingenuous mood essential to the play than this song, which is as graceful and pretty in melody as it is arch in sentiment. With the dialogue which follows, a variation of the closing

cadence of the song is sweetly blended by the orchestra. *Hänsel* crowns *Gretel* Queen of the Woods with the floral wreath, and is doing mock reverence to her when a cuckoo calls from a distance. The children mimic the cry, then playfully twit the bird with allusions to its bad practice of eating the eggs of other birds and neglecting its own offspring. Then they play at cuckoo, eating the strawberries in lieu of eggs, until the basket is empty. They remember the threat of their mother, and want to fill the basket again, but darkness is settling around them. They lose their way, and their agitated fancy sees spectres and goblins all around them. *Hänsel* tries to reassure his sister by hallooing, and scores of voices send back echoes, while the cuckoo continues its lonely cry. *Gretel* is overcome by fear for a moment, and *Hänsel,* too, succumbs to fright when he sees a figure approaching through the mist. But it is not a goblin, as the children think — only the *Sandman,* a little gray, stoop-shouldered old man, carrying a bag. He smiles reassuringly and sings a song of his love for children, while he sprinkles sleep-sand in the eyes of the pair. The second part of his song introduces another significant phrase into the score; it is the "Theme of Promise," to which the Sleep Fairy sings the assurance that the angels give protection and send sweet dreams to good children while they are asleep:—



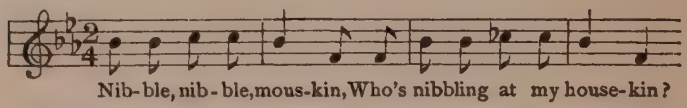
"*Sandman* has been here," says *Hänsel*, sleepily; "let us say our evening blessing." They kneel and repeat the prayer to the melody which has been called the "Prayer Theme," then go to sleep in each other's arms. All has been dark. Now a bright light pierces the mist, which gathers itself into a cloud that gradually takes the shape of a staircase reaching apparently from heaven to earth. The orchestra plays a beautiful and extended piece of music, of which the principal melodic material is derived from the themes of "Prayer" and "Promise," while seven pairs of angels descend the cloud-stairs and group themselves about the little sleepers, and a golden host extends upward to the celestial abode. By this time the scene is filled with a glory of light, and the curtain closes.

The greater part of the dramatic story is told in the third act. The opening of the curtain is preceded by a brief instrumental number, the principal elements of which are a new theme:—



and the "Theme of Fulfilment." The significance of the latter in this place is obvious: the promised benison to the children has been received. The former theme is a pretty illustration of what has already been said of Humperdinck's consistent devotion to the folk-song spirit in his choice of melodies. The phrase has an interrogatory turn and

is, in fact, the melody of the mysterious question which comes from the house of the *Witch* a few minutes later, when the children help themselves to some of the toothsome material out of which the magic structure is built: —



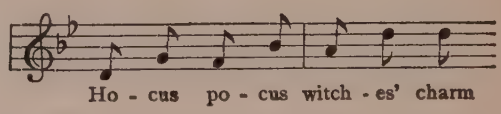
Simple as this little phrase is, it is yet a draught from a song-game that comes nigh to being universal. No phrase is more prevalent among nursery songs than that made up of the first six notes. The original German song itself has come down to American and English children, and enthusiastic folklorists see in it a relic of the ancient tree worship and an invocation of Frau Holda, the goddess of love and spring of our Teutonic ancestors. It is the first phrase of the German, "Ringel, ringel, reihe," which our children know as "Ring around a rosy." It was an amiable conceit of the composer's to put such a tune into the mouth of the *Witch* at a moment of terror in the play. By it he publishes his intention not to be too utterly gruesome in his treatment of the hag. This intention, moreover, he fulfils in the succeeding scene. The *Witch* appears weird and wicked enough in appearance, in her discordant laugh, and the instrumental delineation of her, but when she sings to the children, she is almost ingratiating. Of course, she is seeking to lure them to a horrible fate, but though she

does not deceive them for even a moment, her musical manner is much like theirs, except when she is whirling through the air on a broomstick.

When the curtain opens on the third act the scene is the same as at the close of the second, except that morning is breaking and the background is filled with mist, which is slowly dissipated during the song of the *Dewman* (Dawn Fairy), who sprinkles dew on the sleeping children as he sings. The beginning of his song is like that of the *Sandman*, but its second part consists of the melody of "Fulfilment" instead of that of "Promise." *Gretel* is the first to awake, and she wakes *Hänsel* by imitating the song of the lark. He springs up with the cry of chanticleer, and lark's trill and cock's crow are mingled in a most winsome duet, which runs out into a description of the dream. They look about them to point out the spot where the angels had been. By this time the last veil of mist has withdrawn from the background, and in the place of the forest of firs the gingerbread house stands glistening with barley sugar in the sunshine. To the left is the *Witch's* oven, to the right a cage, all inside a fence of gingerbread children. A duet of admiration and amazement follows in a new, undulatory melody. *Hänsel* wants to enter the house, but *Gretel* holds him back. Finally they decide to venture so far as to nibble a bit. *Hänsel* stealthily breaks a piece of gingerbread off the corner, and at once the voice of the *Witch* is heard in the phrase already quoted: —

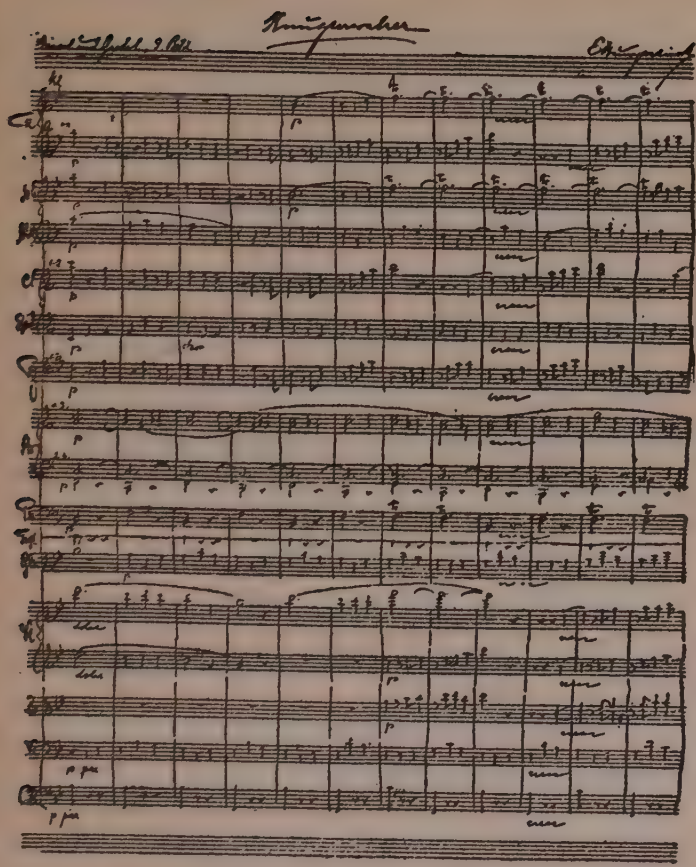
Nibble, nibble, mousekin,
Who's nibbling at my housekin?

After a moment of alarm *Gretel* picks up a bit of the gingerbread which had fallen from *Hänsel's* hand at the sound of the *Witch's* voice, and the duet of enjoyment is resumed in a higher key. Then a second piece of gingerbread is stolen and munched, and the weird voice is heard again; but this time without alarm. The *Witch* stealthily approaches and throws a noose about *Hänsel's* neck. They have fallen into her clutches, and in a luring song she tells of the sweetmeats which she keeps in the house for children of whom she is fond. *Hänsel* and *Gretel* are not won over, however, by her blandishments, and try to run away. The *Witch* extends her magic wand and chants the charm which deprives her victims of the power of motion, beginning: —



This phrase stands in the score as the antithesis of the "Counter-Charm" mentioned in the analysis of the prelude. It illustrates an ingenious constructive device. Desiring to send *Gretel* on an errand a moment later, the *Witch* disenchants her with the formula,

Hocus, pocus, elderbush,



Fac-simile of Humperdinck's Autograph. The *Knusperwalzer*, Act II, "Hänsel und Gretel."

already described as the first theme of the *Allegro* in the prelude. It is an inversion of the theme of enchantment, a proceeding analogous to reversing the rod, or spelling the charm backward. Wagner makes use of the same device in "Götterdämmerung" when he symbolizes the end of things by inverting the symbol of the original elements in "Das Rheingold." The *Witch* now discloses her true character, and in the exuberance of her demoniac glee indulges in a ride on a broom, first repeating some jargon in imitation of the cabalistic formulas common to mediæval necromancy. Frau Wette's lines are partly a copy of the *Witch's* multiplication table in Goethe's "Faust." The play hurries to its catastrophe. *Gretel* gives *Hänsel* power of motion by repeating the "Counter-Charm," which she has overheard from the *Witch*, and the children push the hag into her own oven while she is heating it to roast *Hänsel*. The two then break into a jubilant waltz, which the composer designates the *Knusperwalzer*, *i.e.* the "Crust Waltz." A frightful explosion destroys the *Witch's* oven, and with the crash the gingerbread covering falls from the children, who formed the fence around the house. They are unable to move, being still partly under a spell, but when *Hänsel* repeats the "Counter-Charm," they crowd around their deliverers and sing their gratitude. The parents of *Hänsel* and *Gretel*, who have been hunting them, appear on the scene. Out of the ruins of the oven the happy children drag the figure of the *Witch* baked into a

monstrous gingerbread, and dance around it hand in hand. At the last all join in a swelling utterance of the "Prayer Theme" to the words, "When need is greatest God is nearest."

Mr. Krehbiel's other book, A SECOND BOOK OF OPERAS, considers such important works as *Samson et Dalila, Pagliacci, Madama Butterfly, Boris Godounoff, etc.*

Printed in the United States of America